

## I AM LEGEND....NOT

She slowly and drowsily became aware of the pigman, grunting and snorting as he pushed into her. She turned her head toward the small bedside table and glanced at the digital clock. The glowing numbers read 12:35 p.m. Yippee. She just turned eleven. She had endured the pigman's attentions from the age of three. Those early years were spent with her completely conscious and aware of everything the foul filth of an uncle put her through. As she reached six, odd things began to happen every time he entered her room. Winds would swirl the toys and debris in her room, ruffling the pigman's clothes and sparking momentary terror in his eyes. After several of these occurrences, the worst of which had him forcibly pushed out of the room and slammed against the hallway wall, he approached a pharmacist friend for some assistance in procuring a sedative. At first, he put it in her food and drink, but she very quickly got wise and refused to eat or drink anything offered. He contacted the pharmacist friend again, who suggested that he could recommend something topical. It only took a small amount applied to the skin to render the recipient unconscious. He, being an avid gardener, kept a supply of rubber gloves handy. He would spray the concoction on the gloves, then randomly slap her across the face. Because she had endured abuse from him, as well as his scrawny fishwife, she didn't flinch at the strike. A half hour later, she was down for the count, and the pigman would carry her up to her room, where he would repeatedly molest her unmoving and unresponsive form.

For five long years, she unknowingly endured the abuse. She would wake up the following morning, feeling headachy and hung over, and see blood staining her sheets. Because she maintained vivid memories of the molestation at an early age, she knew very well what went on after she passed out. It was rare that she was able to escape the belts to her face, and most of the time, she took the abuse with her head hanging down. She was too... dead inside to be aware of, or even care how he was able to render her unconscious. Her body always ached and bled from his torturous attentions, but she cared little. She never even dreamed or wished for a way out. There wasn't one. She never went to school, and as far as she knew, nobody even knew she existed. But that was all about to change. Harry

Potter...yes, that's her name...was about to receive the best news of her young life.

An unexpected bang at the windows alerted her that something was outside her bedroom window. The noise startled the pigman out of his reverie and he pulled out of her quickly, got up, and looked out the window. Hovering outside was an owl. A huge owl. It banged at the window again, and Harry slowly crawled out of the bed, not noticing or caring at her nudity, and opened the window. The letter the owl had in its beak was dropped into her outstretched hand, and the owl, having accomplished its mission, flew away. She turned the letter over in her hand and read the name on the front of it. Harry Potter, it said. First Bedroom at the Top of the Stairs, Number 4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging. The back of the envelope had a wax seal with a crest pressed into it, and a return address. Albus Dumbledore, Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. A small frown crossed her normally placid and empty features. Witchcraft and Wizardry? She started to open the letter, but the pigman named Vernon Dursley made to grab the parchment from her hands. She turned her head and glared at him, her brilliant green eyes going menacingly dark, sending chills down the pigman's spine. He quickly withdrew the hand, stuttering something about seeing to Petunia and Dudley, and almost sprinting from the room, his thunderous strides rattling the few small possessions she had in her room.

Harry cracked the wax seal on the letter and read the contents. Apparently, she was to be picked up by someone named Hagrid, and taken to Diagon Alley where she could get money to by robes, and books, and parchment and a.....wait, this can't be right....a wand. She was to attend this Hogwart's place, as a wizarding student. Never mind that she's a girl, and supposed to be called a witch. She deliberately kept her unruly coal black locks short in a boyish haircut. She wanted no one to know she was a girl.

Suddenly, there was a great pounding on the front door that rattled the house down to its foundation. Vernon thudded down the stairs, and the fleeting thought I hope he falls through the stairs and into the cellar, smashing his pathetic and disgusting skull on the stone floor passed through her head before she slowly made her way out the door and down the staircase. She reached the bottom of the stairs

just as Petunia answered the door, her pigman husband and pathetic pasty doughboy son cowering behind her. The three stepped back in shock, gasps filling the air as one of the biggest persons Harry had ever seen strode through the open doorway. His hoary visage was truly frightening, and he barely passed a glance on the family trembling in the hallway before his eyes lit on the lithe figure on the stairs.

“Arry? Are yeh ‘Arry Potter?” he rumbled gruffly. Harry could only nod, her trust of people so overstrained that she refused to give anyone any ammunition to use against her. His black eyes bore into her, taking in her disheveled appearance and suspiciously stained nightshirt. Those piercing eyes narrowed, and he turned his head slowly to take in the other inhabitants of the house. His eyes didn’t fail to notice the bruises on her legs and arms and face, either. He took one menacing step toward the pigman’s family before taking himself firmly in hand. He turned back to Harry and smiled.

“Come on, ‘Arry. Git yer things. Yer comin’ wif me.” Harry nodded again and trooped back up the stairs. She gathered her few belongings into a battered and torn knapsack and dressed in baggy jeans and a flannel shirt. She slipped her feet into some muddy sneakers and strode down the stairs. She didn’t even spare a glance at her “family” as she walked out the door.

Hagrid and Harry finally arrived at The Leaky Cauldron, where the half-giant proceeded to open up the passageway to Diagon Alley. Harry stepped through the portal, and her mouth dropped open in amazement. Everywhere she looked were people wearing funny robes of all shapes and colors. Some of them even wore those tall pointy wizard and witch hats. The storefronts had really bizarre decorations, and some of the shop windows had really strange items on display. Harry slowly stepped forward onto the cobblestone street, looking at everything. For the first time in eight years, some kind of real emotion appeared on her face. It flashed by briefly, but it was there. Then Hagrid gently guided her toward Gringotts, telling her along the way that she had a great deal of wizard money in a vault there, left to her by her parents.

Parents, she thought. Did I even have parents? Why don't I even remember them? I don't think the Dursleys even mentioned them. She looked up at the mountainous man and hesitantly asked him about her parents.

"Well, yer parents was killed by You-Know-Who when yeh was just a little feller. He's what gave yeh that there scar on yer head." Harry reached up and felt the lightning-bolt shaped indentation in her forehead, waiting for some kind of emotion to seep through the blank numbness. She knew she should've felt something for the deaths of her parents. The only thing she knew was that there was a black hole in her soul that sucked all her feelings away. After Gringotts, Hagrid went into the Magical Menagerie to pick up a birthday present for Harry, while she went into Madame Malkin's Robes for All Occasions, to get her school robes.

It was while she was in this shop, getting fitted for her uniform robes, where she met Draco Malfoy for the very first time. She saw him on the other dais, getting measured for his robes. He looked ethereal, as the sunlight from the high windows lit his silvery blonde hair. His rounded pale face looked angelic, and his rosebud lips were perfection itself. Harry felt a spark in her chest, a small flickering flame that pierced the darkness that had become her soul. She stepped onto the other dais, and surreptitiously glanced at him from the corner of her eye. She had thought an angel had fallen from heaven.....until he opened his mouth.

"Mother, please get this.....thing (indicating the seamstress) off of me. I should only be serviced by Malkin herself," Draco drawled haughtily. He sneered in contempt at the bent head of the diminutive woman, as the tall statuesque blonde slowly glided into view. She snapped her long, slender fingers, and instantly the seamstress disappeared, with Madame Malkin scurrying up to complete Malfoy's fitting. The seamstress turned her attentions to Harry, draping a Hogwarts school robe around her slender body and spelling it to fit. Both children were finished with their fittings at the same time, and turned toward each other with the intention of climbing down from their perches. Draco glanced up and instantly saw the scar on the girl's forehead, and his silver eyes widened almost comically.

"Are you really Harry Potter?" he gasped incredulously. At her slight nod, Draco gave a barely suppressed un-Malfoy like squeal of glee. He immediately darted forward, hand out, prepared to shake her hand and introduce himself. His rapid advance caused her to stumble backward away from him, her eyes widening with growing trepidation. He paused, looking at her, deliberating her abrupt retreat, before slowly taking two steps forward. He extended his hand again, and gently said, "Hello. My name is Draco Malfoy. Since we're to be compatriots at Hogwarts, I felt it was my duty to introduce myself and offer my hand in friendship. Do you accept?" She stared into those silvery eyes, and saw nothing but honest admiration and friendliness. She stuck her hand out and grasped his fingers with hers. They pumped their joined hands up and down a couple of times, and she smiled shyly at him. Her first genuine smile in eight years.

"Smashing!" Draco gushed. "We'll see you at King's Cross on September First. I would love the honor of showing you around and introducing you to some of my best friends. I think I can guarantee that you'll be safe there." With that, the Malfoys exited the shop. Her fitting also finished and clothing paid for, Harry also left the shop just in time to see Hagrid exiting the Menagerie, with an albino python, about two feet long, draped across his broad shoulders.

"Sompin' tol' me to go inter the Menagerie. This little beauty was callin' to me. She's yers. Her name's Banana. Happy Birthday, Harry." Harry sighed in awe and gently took the undulating creature

from the giant's outstretched hands. She draped the serpent gently around her small shoulders, and the snake hissed her greeting. Harry hissed her own back, and introduced herself to the snake. The python hissed happily back, glad of a master she could really relate to.

Harry and the half-giant slowly made their way to Flourish & Blott's, where she was to pick up her school texts. As she approached the door, it opened abruptly, and she came face-to-face with Draco Malfoy again. He smiled in genuine pleasure, his silver eyes lighting as he stared into her bottomless green ones. She smiled shyly in return; for the first time in eight years, she felt a nugget of warmth for another human being. She was somewhat startled at the feeling, but relaxed into it.

"Oh," Draco sighed when he spotted the albino serpent gracing her shoulders, "it's beautiful. Have you named it, yet?"

"Her name is Banana, and no, I didn't name her. Hagrid did," she replied softly.

"Well, that just won't do," Malfoy quipped. "Only the true owner of the familiar is allowed to name her."

"I've never had a pet before," Harry replied hesitantly. She pondered for a moment, thinking of names. She glanced at the snake, who looked back at her with yellow eyes and forked tongue, waiting patiently for her christening.

What name would you prefer? Harry hissed at the snake.

You are my master. It is up to you to name me.

I will call you Dragon, because you are golden and beautiful like this boy.

I accept willingly your name of me.

During the exchange between Harry and the snake, Draco had paled considerably. When she glanced back at the boy, she noticed that he looked like he was going to pass out. She hesitantly reached out for his elbow, perhaps to prevent him from falling, when he shook himself violently, his expression clearing.

"I didn't know you could speak Parseltongue," Draco said in amazement.

"Is that what that is?" she replied. "I've always done it. It's weird, too. I'd be outside in the garden, trying to make myself as invisible as possible, and the little garter snakes would come out of hiding and we'd have endless conversations. I never knew it had anything to do with this whole wizarding thing." She gave a small smile to Malfoy again. Next to her, Hagrid shifted, eyeing the small boy with great trepidation. He made an impatient sound, which was as loud as cannon fire, startling both kids badly. Draco flushed, his pale skin turning a lovely shade of pink, and mumbled something about meeting his mom at Florean Fetescue's for a sundae. He asked Harry if she wanted to join him. She turned to Hagrid, noticing the scowl on his face, then turned back to Draco and quietly accepted.

"I'll meet you there after I get my texts," she said simply. Draco just grinned and ran off, almost taking out a street full of wizards in uniform robes. Harry watched him leave, a small smile on her face, then turned to the door. Before she could enter, Hagrid cleared his throat, meaning to say something to her. She turned her level green gaze on him and waited.

"Yeh really shouldn' get friendly-like wih' him," the man grumbled. "His father's evil. Part o' a wizarding society tha' wants ter keep muggleborns and halfbloods on leashes. He's gonna follow in his da's footsteps."

Harry looked at Hagrid for a moment longer, something burning in the depths of those emerald eyes, before turning to the door and entering the shop. Hagrid remained outside, watching for anything suspicious. It wouldn't do to allow Dumbledore's pet project be harmed before Hagrid could get him to Hogwarts. Inside the shop, Harry looked at the list of books she needed. She quickly navigated the crowded shop, trying valiantly not to be jostled or touched by the strangers surrounding her. Someone noticed the scar on her forehead, and a squeal went out through the shop.

"It's him!" someone shrieked. "It's Harry Potter! Look! Right there! The real Harry Potter!" The voice got louder and louder as it continued to speak, and eyes suddenly turned to her. She flinched visibly away from all the attention, terrified that her pigman uncle had somehow



told all these strangers how he used her, and that they could use her the same way. She started to back up, the books falling from her nerveless fingers, when her back came up against another body. She spun quickly, saw Draco standing behind her, and threw herself into his arms. He quickly spun her away from the crowd, standing in front of her like a shield. The approaching crowd halted instantly at the wall of bodies protecting Harry. She peered out from between two of the heads in front of her, watching the events unfold with great relief.

Draco had returned to the shop, having forgotten his Potions book (wouldn't do to not have his supplies or texts in his godfather's class) when he saw the crowd begin to advance on the trembling form. He quickly signaled some of his friends, and they entered the store, creating the wall of protection she now cowered behind.

"You would do well to back off," warned the blonde venomously. "My father is just moments away, as are Mr. Zabini, Mr. Parkinson, Mr. Crabbe, Mr. Goyle and Mr. Bullstrode. This boy was just trying to get his books for school. He didn't ask to be molested and mauled, and you'll not get near him." The threat was implicit, and the shop owner hurriedly brushed the crowd out the door, before locking it behind them.

"I'm so sorry," he gushed effusively. "I didn't realize that they'd go quite that mad to meet the great Harry Potter." Harry looked at the shopkeeper as if he were insane, then tapped Draco on his shoulder, getting him to turn to her.

"What was that all about?" she asked shakily. She was still trembling from the fear, and the blonde put his hands slowly out and stroked her upper arms in comfort. She calmed almost instantly, and glanced up at him, green locking with silver in a brief, heated exchange. Draco inhaled deeply to get his suddenly rampaging emotions under control, and started to explain the legend of the great Harry Potter. Harry's brow furrowed, and deep creases bracketed her frowning mouth as she listened to the ridiculousness being told her. She glanced occasionally at the line of people standing next to him, curious but patient. He finished his story, and she just couldn't help herself. She let loose with laughter so hard it doubled her up. Oh my, she thought, I haven't laughed so well in such a long time. That felt really really

good. Harry was eventually able to get herself under control, and looked up into those silver eyes again, seeing the puzzlement there.

“I’m sorry,” she sighed out. “None of that’s true. Not a word. It can’t be. My earliest memories are of when I was three, and pigman....never mind.” Draco absorbed the words, and pondered at the hidden meaning behind them, as Harry went on. “The scar,” she said, “happened when I was five. My cousin was playing with a toy aeroplane, swinging it around on a yellow cord. I just happened to step into the room as it was making its circuit above his head, and the wing clipped me in the head. It cut a deep gash, on which my aunt slapped a bandaid. After a couple of days, the cut became septic, and split even further. I was able to sneak some antibiotic ointment from the bathroom and stop the infection, but it left this rather weird scar. I don’t know who this Voldi...Vendi....Whatsis is, but I’ve never met him. And he never gave me this scar.”

Draco looked around at his friends, and saw the same confused looks his face wore. He looked back at Harry, with questions in those silver eyes. She fidgeted uncomfortably, not really wanting to go into anything about her past with anyone, but she felt she could trust this small group of people. Friends, she corrected herself. They put themselves between me and the world. I can call them friends. My first friends. She looked at the group again, then looked at Draco, the wish for introductions clear in her green gaze. Draco shook himself and smiled a little shamefully, another lovely crimson blush staining his beautiful porcelain skin.

"Right, well, the gentleman on the end," he pointed to the left, "is Blaise Zabini. The girl standing next to him is Pansy Parkinson. The big fellow standing to my immediate left is Vincent Crabbe. The gentleman to my immediate right is Gregory Goyle, and the lady next to him is Millicent Bultstrode." Draco smiled fondly at each person as he introduced him or her, and Harry watched his face closely, feeling a small kernel of envy curling in her darkened soul for the closeness of these friends. Draco then turned back to her and raised one perfectly shaped eyebrow in question. Heaving a heavy sigh, Harry began to speak.

"I don't know why I feel safe in sharing this with you. No one has ever come to my rescue like that. My parents are unknown to me. But apparently, they had a skewed sense of humor, as they named me Harry." When Draco and the others looked flummoxed, she went on to explain. "I'm a girl. When my parents died, I was sent to live with pigman....er....I mean Vernon Dursley and his disgusting family. At the age of three, pigman started raping me nightly. I was awake and aware of it for three years. When I hit six years old, I started to....affect things. Make things happen. Enough so pigman got scared and left me alone for a short time. But then, apparently, he got hold of some sedatives. He'd put them in my food or drink, then rape my unconscious body. I started refusing food and he found a way to do it topically. He'd spray his rubber gardening gloves with the stuff and randomly slap me across the face. There was no way I could avoid the slaps, so I suffered under his girth until the owl delivered that letter to me last night. Then I met you" indicating Draco "in that robe place, and I finally felt...something...for the first time in my life. I feel I can trust you. You make me feel safe." Harry's face had been

getting redder and hotter during this small speech, and her green eyes had dimmed. Draco's own shock and horror was eclipsed by the haunted, hunted look in Harry's eyes. He looked at his friends, who all wore similar expressions of shock and disgust, and an unspoken signal went out to all. This is our duty, they seemed to say to each other with their eyes. This is what we are meant to do. Protect him. No, protect her.

Harry looked up to see the looks on all their faces, and believed that they were disgusted with her. Tears she hadn't been able to shed since she was three started to spill from her enormous eyes, and her lips trembled. She stifled a sob as she turned and made to bolt from the shop. Draco, seeing the emotion and the movement, quickly stepped in front of her, barring her way. She looked up quickly and saw the kindness and compassion in his eyes. It was her undoing. Eight years of torture, pain, fear and rage blew out of her in a strangled cry. Shelves trembled and knick-knacks scattered around the shop rattled and exploded, going off like bombs and spraying everyone and everything with shrapnel. She collapsed against Draco, who held her in his arms and spoke soothing nonsense words in her ear. The rest of the group encircled the pair and offered their emotional and physical support to the frail, fragile, powerful girl.

Eventually, she was able to pull herself together enough to finish shopping. The group gathered her dropped books, and Draco escorted her as she browsed the rest of the shelves. He occasionally made recommendations to her for additional texts she would find useful or interesting. Once finished, she paid for her purchases and they exited the store as a unified group. Hagrid, who had disappeared down another alley while she was being accosted in the store, had returned to his spot. He looked askance at the group, trying to figure out a way to get the boy away from this particular crowd. Dumbledore didn't want Harry associating with anyone but who he picked to be the boy's particular friends. Dumbledore knew Harry's true sex and deliberately neglected to tell the giant, preferring to keep as many people in the dark about her true worth as possible. He calculatingly led the entire wizarding world to believe that Harry Potter was male, and that he would save the world. His true ambitions and goals were much more sinister and Machiavellian. He wanted her incredible power. With her power, Dumbledore would live forever as the most

powerful wizard who ever lived. Period. So Hagrid was instructed to not allow Harry to make any friends before she got on the Hogwarts Express.

Hagrid's failure to do just that weighed heavily on him. He tried to cut Harry from the pack, to get him alone and talk to him about certain people, but the group as a unit stood in front of Harry, protecting her and keeping her safe. She looked at the gigantic man, her green gaze sharp and threatening. She knew what he wanted. She knew that he only wanted to isolate her so he could use her. She wasn't stupid. But her friends were there to protect her. She gave a silly smile. Another first. She was really happy for the first time in forever. And she loved the feeling. Again, as if by some hidden signal, as a group they all turned toward Fortescue's and that ice cream Draco had promised.

"Oh, I thought you'd like to know," she started shyly, giving little glances to Draco, "that I've named my snake Dragon. I thought, since she was beautiful and golden like you that the true meaning of your name would be a good name for her. I hope you don't mind?" her voice raised in question at the end. She blushed furiously and dropped her eyes, afraid of what she'd see on his face. She missed the look of shocked pleasure that briefly graced his features. He gently took her elbow and whispered in her ear that the name was lovely, and suited the serpent. Harry smiled again and relaxed completely. The snake lifted her head from Harry's shoulder and extended herself to flick Draco's ear with her forked tongue, letting him know that she was happy that Master was happy. He giggled at the tickling sensation, and gently stroked the serpent under her chin. She hissed happily, and Harry giggled. When Draco looked at her questioningly, she smirked (yet another first) and told him that the snake was glad that he was Harry's boyfriend. Then she blushed and darted through the doors of the parlor, running up to the cool counter where she eyed all the ice creams. Draco's friends all looked at him, knowing smirks gracing every face. Draco blushed furiously and grumbled something about nosey busybodies before he stormed into the shop. He stopped next to Harry, and smiled shyly at her before looking at the ice cream flavors.

The children all ordered their ice creams, with Harry insisting that she would pay, and they found Draco's mother seated at a large booth at the back of the shop. Narcissa had expected that her beautiful boy would find all his friends, so she found a table that would accommodate them all. Her brows raised elegantly on her forehead when she spied Harry Potter among the group, smiling and laughing. She gave a searching look to her son, who shook his head and signaled that it wasn't the time for questions. She nodded imperceptibly, knowing that Draco would fill her in later. Narcissa slid to one end of the booth, so the children could shove in together around the rest of the bench. Bulstrode slid in first, followed by Zabini, then Parkinson, Potter, Draco, Crabbe and finally Goyle. The booth was a mite crowded, but all the kids were very quiet and respectful, and tried very hard not to jostle each other. Narcissa smiled fondly at their antics, wondering how long it would be before they became boisterous. They spent some time at the parlor, laughing and joking, but they never got out of hand. And Narcissa's curiosity was peaked when she noticed how gentle everyone was with Potter. As if the boy was a fragile piece of priceless porcelain.

The serpent around Harry's neck chose that moment to slither across Draco's shoulders and constrict her body, using her head and tail to pull the children closer together. The hiss she gave off sounded almost smug and Harry blushed to the roots of her raven hair. Draco looked at her, amusement in his face, his silvery eyes conveying trust and affection, and quirked a blonde eyebrow, curious as to exactly what the snake said that made the girl blush so. Harry cleared her throat and mumbled something almost inaudibly. Draco leaned closer, indicating that she should repeat herself.

"Dragon told me to..." she whispered, and hesitated. Then she reached up and gently and quickly kissed Draco's cheek. His mother's eyebrows shot into her hairline as Draco also blushed and smiled sweetly. Narcissa looked closer at Harry, and noticed for the first time how delicate her features were. The femininity was obvious, despite the massacre to her glorious coal locks. Narcissa smiled slowly, pondering all the possibilities a union between these two would bring about.

After some time at the shop, Harry decided that she needed to finish her shopping. Goyle, Crabbe, and Draco all slid out of the booth, allowing Harry to get up. She smiled at Draco, and gently brushed his hand with her fingers before saying a quick goodbye to the rest and darting out of the shop.

“Explanations, son,” Narcissa drawled. Draco, who was watching Harry through the large picture window in the front, turned slowly to his mother.

“Harry Potter is a girl. Dumbledore’s been feeding us lies all this time. Voldemort didn’t give her that scar. Her stupid cousin did. When she was five. And...” Draco hesitated, not sure what he would tell his mother about Harry’s home life. Being purebloods, it would be difficult for Draco’s parents to get past the idea that Harry was damaged goods. Draco didn’t want to hide anything from his mother, but he didn’t want to abuse the open trust Harry showed him from the first. He took a deep breath, and began to tell Harry’s story, slowly and quietly. Narcissa quickly cast a silencing spell around the booth, as she suspected from the looks on the children’s faces that the story wasn’t going to be good. Not at all.

Outside, Harry looked up at Hagrid again, her green gaze measuring. For his part, the giant started to squirm under the intensity of that look. He cleared his throat and gruffly bade her follow him. He tried to place a companionable hand on the lad’s shoulder, but he ducked out from under the hand before it could make full contact, and the boy strode a few paces away from the man. Hagrid tried not to be offended as he led Harry to Ollivander’s, where she had to pick up her wand.

She entered the shop and looked around. The bell had tinkled when she first entered the door, and an old man with white, flyaway cotton candy hair came drifting from between shelves. He gave her a considering look, and without saying a word went back amongst his shelves, searching all of the old boxes. He finally found what he was looking for and brought it back out. He held it reverently, and slowly handed it to her.

It was a beautifully handcrafted mahogany box, lacquered until the wood glowed red. The smooth surface was cool in her hands, and her stomach fluttered with anticipation as she opened the box. Inside was a crystal wand covered with scroll work, filigree, and runic symbols. There seemed to be a defect with it; what looked like a fine hairline crack went down the exact center of the crystal from tip to tip. It was truly a thing of beauty, and she looked expectantly at the old man.

"This wand is not made by human hands. It was formed millennia ago in rock formations in a cave off the coast of Australia. The filigree and runic symbols were carved by a long-dead master craftsman. I found it there lying on a dusty shelf in an old junk shop on my travels. Its power...sang to me.....called to me. Wanted me to find it. So I brought it here, knowing that a very special" and here Ollivander hesitated, glancing at the half-giant lounging in the open doorway, "wizard" said with imperceptible emphasis, "would be here to collect it. It is very powerful, completely inflexible, with a core I am unfamiliar with. That crack you see is some kind of....magical being hair that the crystal formed around. I've no doubt that the creature who used to sport that hair is now extinct, and there are no ways to tell what kind of hair that is. It is, however, gravid with magic. Pick up the wand and swish it." Harry did as she was asked, and vibrations thrummed up her arm and through her body at the touch of the cool crystal to her fingers. She felt the magic wrap itself around her core and ignite a deep fire. She gasped, overwhelmed by the feeling of warmth and peace that invaded her darkened soul. She gave a tentative swish of the wand, and sparks blew violently from the end. Ollivander nodded, knowing that his purpose was served, and now he could meet whatever fate lie ahead with his head up and his eyes wide open.

Harry looked at the old man, waiting for the price. But Ollivander just waved her off and ambled back into his shelves, a bemused expression on his face. She caught him saying something about 'rightful owner' and 'back where it belongs' before he wandered out of sight. She placed the wand back into the box and slid the box into her bulging knapsack. She looked at it, then looked at Hagrid and asked if there was someplace she could get a new knapsack. He looked at her, a puzzled frown on his face. Then he smiled and took Harry to the stationers shop, where she was able to purchase a good-size trunk, along with all of her stationery supplies. They then went to the



apothecary, where Harry stocked up on potions supplies, before finishing off at the cauldron shop, where she purchased a good, sturdy cast iron cauldron. With all of her supplies purchased, they made their way to the archway exit of Diagon Alley, where they stepped through, back to the Leaky Cauldron. Since Harry wasn't going back to Privet Drive anymore, Hagrid helped her to obtain sleeping rooms at the Cauldron, where she would be staying until school started. With a heavy sigh of gratitude, she collapsed on the bed and looked up at the stained, worn canopy, wondering at the strange twist of fate that barged in to save her life.

Harry's heart started fluttering in her chest, and her stomach did flip-flops as a tall man with long white hair and a long white beard stood in the doorway of her sleeping room, his blue eyes twinkling. His eyes had an almost predatory look to them as he gazed at the child. This look ratcheted up the girl's nerves to almost excruciating tightness, and her stomach stopped flipping, instead choosing to harden into a tight ball. The man in the doorway approached her slowly, and she backed away from him, keeping the furniture in the center of the room between him and herself. They danced around the room for a while, the man never able to get very close to the trembling girl. He opened his mouth to speak, and sudden noise from the hallway startled them. He snapped his mouth shut with a harsh click as knuckles rapped sharply on the door. Without invitation, the door opened and Draco stood there, framed in the doorway. His friends were gathered behind him, looking in at the scene. Draco took one look at Harry's face, seeing the terror in her emerald eyes, and quickly crossed the room to her side. He placed his hand at the small of her back, and she suddenly felt safer. The rest of the group quickly followed, forming a shield between the two and the man in the room. They glared at the man, menace vibrating throughout the room. Without a word being spoken, the man left, quietly closing the door behind him.

Harry released the breath she had been holding and sagged against Draco's side. He glanced down at her and slid his arm around her waist. The others turned to them, and everyone started chatting as if nothing had happened. They helped her gather her belongings to go to the train station. She draped Dragon around her shoulders, and the snake curled up around her throat, the weight a comfort. Dragon hissed in her ear, as if telling her a private joke, and Harry blushed and smiled. She looked at Draco with smiling green eyes, watching him gather her books and supplies and loading them into her trunk. He glanced up at her in that moment, and silver met green in another searing gaze. Crabbe cleared his throat and the two jumped, looking away and blushing madly. Crabbe and Goyle grinned and picked up Harry's packed trunk, carrying it out the door and down the stairs. The rest of the group followed, and Harry and Draco, the last to leave, drifted together. Draco reached out to take her hand, and she started. He went to release her fingers, but she tightened them around his and squeezed gratefully. Draco blushed and smiled, happy that she would trust him enough to allow this small contact. They went down

the stairs together and out the front door. The sparse patrons in the bar looked at the pair in confusion, wondering when the Malfoy heir had turned gay.

Outside, there was a long, luxurious limousine waiting, the engine running. Crabbe and Goyle packed her trunk in the expansive boot and climbed into the back seat. The door was open, and Harry leaned in cautiously, looking at everyone inside the car. As well as Pansy, Blaise, Vince, Greg, and Millie, there was also Narcissa and a fine-boned elegant gentleman in the car. He had long silvery blonde hair, and carried a dragon-head cane. His fine aristocratic features reflected in the eleven-year-old boy standing next to her. Ah, she thought, this must be Draco's dad. This is how handsome Draco'll be when he grows up. Yum. She blushed at her errant thoughts as Narcissa opened her mouth.

"Please don't stare. It's rude. This," indicating the man seated across from her, "is Draco's father, Lucius Malfoy. Please, come into the car so we can get you children to the train on time." Harry blushed again (she had never blushed this much in her entire life) and climbed quickly into the car. She stepped over Lucius and curled up against the far side of the car. Draco quickly climbed in after and sat next to her, allowing his warmth and nearness to comfort her in the uncomfortable situation she found herself. Nothing was said as they journeyed to King's Cross. Indeed, nothing was said until they exited the car. Lucius reached out to Harry as she exited the car, and she flinched violently away from the hand, almost stumbling into Narcissa's lap. Draco quickly reached out to steady the girl, and she reached gratefully for his hands. He gently pulled her from the car and glared at his father, who looked at the girl with a piercing gaze.

"Father, I had hoped that Mother had informed you of what we spoke about," Draco bit out coldly. "Please, in future, refrain from attempting to touch Harry."

"I apologise, Harry," Lucius responded. "I did not intend to cause you discomfort. I only meant to introduce myself properly and shake your hand. I will try to refrain from approaching you in future until you are ready to allow it."

"Thank you, Mr. Malfoy," Harry replied quietly. She reached out her hand and allowed it to be engulfed in his larger one. Lucius smiled gently as he shook her hand, then released it.

"Draco, a word if you please," he looked at his son. Draco nodded and leaned over to whisper something in the girl's ear. She nodded and stepped over to the rest of the group. They gathered around her in a loose circle, seeming to be just waiting, but Draco knew it was mainly for the girl's protection. All of his friends were alert and watchful as they pretended to be boisterous kids. Harry saw the split attention, and deeply appreciated the warm and fuzzy feelings this protective stance garnered in her.

"What are your feelings for this girl?" Lucius got straight to the point. Draco looked his father directly in the eye and, without flinching, stated that he was quite possibly falling in love with her. Lucius nodded, considering the answer. Draco waited with trepidation, expecting the 'pureblood rant' about damaged goods and protecting the Malfoy name and reputation, and blah, blah, blah. To Draco's utter shock and surprise, his father smiled.

"We would like to enter into a pre-arrangement with you and the girl. We would like to establish a contract for marriage and bonding when the two of you are of age. It will be the only way we can protect her from her relatives and Dumbledore. If she is agreeable, the contract will bind her to the family, allowing us to legally offer shelter and protection. It will, unfortunately, be completely binding and unbreakable, as blood will have to be exchanged between the two of you to seal your intentions. Discuss this with her. She must be completely willing for this binding to be legal and unbreakable." Draco quickly looked at his mother to gauge her reaction. She smiled broadly and nodded, letting him know that she wanted this as well. Then the blonde's eyes narrowed, and he quickly looked back at his father.

"Why are you so agreeable, after knowing her past? What could you gain from this?" The questions were rude, but with Draco's blossoming feelings for Harry, he didn't want to see her hurt or abused any further than she had already been.

“She is astonishingly powerful,” Lucius replied. “I’ve not felt power like that, ever, in my life. I doubt that anyone within the last thousand years has ever been that powerful. She would be a great asset, a very powerful ally, and the two of you would have stunning children. The Malfoy line would only be stronger for having her a part of it. I also,” and here his father smirked, his eyes gleaming wickedly, “am looking forward to training her; I would love to see how far and fast she will grow magically. Dumbledore is a danger, and if he gets her, gets her power, he will be unstoppable. We cannot let that....that....” Lucius struggled for the right descriptive word, “Nazi near her. You must protect her with all you have while you are at Hogwarts.” Lucius looked into eyes as silver as his and smiled at the determination looking back at him. Draco nodded once, and left the car to go to his friends.

They all threw their trunks and bags onto a couple of carts and headed for platform 9. Harry’s ticket said they needed platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ , but all she saw was platform 9 and platform 10. Everyone had lined up in front of the pillar between the platforms, and Harry looked on in befuddled bemusement as, one after the other, her friends dashed at the pillar and disappeared. Draco took her elbow, startling her out of her daze, and gently nudged her toward the pillar. Crabbe and Goyle followed behind with the carts full of luggage. Draco quietly counted, then the pair dashed, Harry slightly ahead of Draco. She stumbled through the pillar, followed very closely by Draco, who stumbled into her, almost knocking her down. He grabbed her quickly to steady her, pulling her into a tight embrace. She sucked in a quick breath, her hands against his chest, and looked up at him, into his silver eyes. Something flared to life deep inside his gaze, and she hastily pulled back, the warmth of his chest still against her hands. He let her go and backed away, but not before she saw the puzzlement in his gaze. She reached for his hand, and after a brief hesitation, he took it and they walked toward the train, catching up with the others. The carts and boys quickly followed, and they got everything loaded before they boarded the Express.

They walked through the cars, an intimidating group of children, surrounding a frail-looking dark-haired, green-eyed boy. They finally found the car they wanted to occupy, far away from the hubbub surrounding them. They all took seats around the blonde and raven-

hair, keeping the protective bubble. They chattered animatedly and excitedly about the coming year, and what house they'll be sorted into. Unanimously, they all chose Slytherin. Harry, not knowing of any of what they were talking about, only hoped that she'd be put into the same house as the wonderful group of people now surrounding her. Looking out the window, she saw crowds of kids and parents, hustling and bustling, trying to get loaded onto the train. She spied a group of astonishing redheads gathered in a group near the entry pillar. She almost flinched at the shockingly vibrant red of the entire clan's hair, grimacing. Gods, she thought desperately, I hope I don't have to meet any of them. She turned away from the window as the door to their car opened and a bushy-haired girl poked her head in. Seeing the fullness of the car, she glanced around at everyone with condescension, before her eyes lit on the scar on Harry's forehead. Those eyes widened comically, and her mouth fell open. She started to gush as she entered the car, approaching Harry. Instantly, four people were in front of Harry, keeping the girl from approaching further. The girl stopped short, glaring at the kids in front of her.

"I want to meet him. Get out of my way," she demanded. She glanced at Harry again, and flinched at the menacing venom darkening the girl's green orbs. "My name is Hermione Granger," she tried again, smiling uncertainly in Harry's direction.

"Well, Granger," Draco drawled lazily, "I don't think Harry wants to meet you. So sod off." Hermione sniffed and spun away, slamming the door to the car so hard that the windows rattled. The kids sat back down and continued their conversation as if nothing happened. Harry grinned, feeling light-hearted and free for the first time ever. She joined in the animated conversation, laughing freely at the jokes and comments made by everyone. The entire time, she never let go of Draco's hand.

Children young and old passed the car, looking in and spying Harry. Eyes always widened, fingers always pointed, and faces always became animated in conversation. Only one other time did someone try to enter the car. One of the carrot-topped children poked his head in, his freckles standing out on his pale face. Harry's eyes widened at the intrusion, and her nose wrinkled in disgust at the ghastly hair color. For his part, the boy's blue eyes widened at the sight of Harry,

and he blushed so brightly that the color of his face matched his hair. His freckles completely disappeared in the tomato-colored complexion. He mumbled his name (all Harry heard was Weasel) and backed out of the car, closing the door quietly. Draco, having had enough of the goldfish bowl feel of the ride so far, pulled the shades down and locked the door. When he sat back down next to Harry, she grabbed his hand again.

“Hey, guys, I really need to talk to you about something,” she began, not sure how they were going to take what she had to say. “I’d really appreciate it if you wouldn’t tell anyone that I’m a girl. I...don’t want the complications, the hassles, the pressures. The looks. Those looks. Please?” Before she had finished talking, everyone was nodding. None of them had a problem honoring her wishes. They knew it was another way they could protect her. That was all that mattered. She smiled in relief and leaned her head against Draco’s shoulder. The snake had made herself comfortable on the bench beside her, and Harry felt drowsy. Draco offered her his lap as a pillow, and she gladly accepted, stretching out on the bench. The serpent stirred and curled up on Harry’s stomach, where Draco was able to stroke her soft scales with a finger as Harry drifted. A small, contented smile graced her face as she sighed in happiness. Draco carded his fingers through her short, messy curls, secretly thinking how gorgeous she would be if her hair was longer. The silky tendrils caressed his fingers almost lovingly, and his heart thudded at the thought of her. He looked up to see Pansy, Blaise and Millie smirking at him. Vince and Greg had gone off exploring, and the gang were delighted to see Draco content. They loved him deeply, and only wanted to see his happiness. Looking at the two curled together, they couldn’t help but marvel at what a hot couple they would make as they got older.

A half hour before the train was to make the station, Draco gently woke the sleeping girl, telling her that she had to get into her school robes. Everyone roused and began shuffling to get their robes out of their trunks. Pansy reached out a hand to help Harry to her feet, and the girl grabbed the hand with no trouble. Pansy’s eyes widened in surprise, and a smile graced her face as she pulled the other child up. Draco smirked. It looks like she’s going to be fine. She’s starting to trust all of us, which will make protecting her much easier, he thought

with pleasure. These were his bestest friends in the world, and he hoped that they would become Harry's bestest friends, as well.



The train finally arrived, and Harry watched the departing passengers from the car windows. Steam billowed from the undercarriage, engulfing the scurrying children. The group had decided to wait until everyone else was off the train, to ensure maximum comfort and safety for the green-eyed child. As she stood there watching, she leaned back into Draco, who had still to let go of her hand. She grasped it tightly in hers as nerves started taking over. The last of the children passed the occupied car, and everyone turned as one unit and marched toward the door. The knob was turned, and, one at a time, they exited the car, Harry in the center of the group. They marched down the corridor to the exit, keeping silent as they went. Dragon was once again draped around Harry's shoulders, and she lifted her head and reached back to flick Draco's chin with her tongue. He smiled at the gesture, and tickled her chin with his finger. She hissed contentedly at him, and Harry's green eyes sparkled with happiness as she turned to look at him.

"She says she loves you," Harry stated quietly. Draco's eyes widened in pleasure, and his smile got bigger. He chuckled softly, shaking his head. Who'd have thought I'd be with the famous Harry Potter? That she'd be a gorgeous girl? That I'd have a snake in love with me?

The group exited the train one at a time, and as soon as everyone was off, they circled around Harry and Draco again, providing the protective bubble. Their things had already been moved to the castle, and they could hear Hagrid's booming voice, beckoning the first years to him. The group approached with the other first years, always providing a buffer between the fragile girl and her surroundings. The children marched to the boats on the lake, and in small groups they climbed aboard. When it came time for Harry's group to climb aboard, they split into two groups. Harry, Draco, Vince and Greg all got aboard one boat, and Pansy, Millie and Blaise aboard another. Greg sat first, with Harry directly behind him. Draco perched behind her, and Vince made up the rear. To ensure that the two boys were comfortable enough, Draco sat on his seat with his legs spread, Harry between them. He wrapped his arms around her waist, and she leaned comfortably back against him. He suddenly caught a whiff of her fragrant locks, and closed his eyes in pleasure at the scent of apple blossom and jasmine. Lost in his reverie, he didn't notice that they had approached the docks near the castle until Dragon flicked

his upper lip with her tongue. Startled, his eyes snapped open, and he grinned into the face looking at him. The hissing coming from the golden beauty sounded almost like amused laughter. Smirking, Draco helped Harry up before standing himself and disembarking.

As a group, the first years trudged, exhausted, toward the castle. Harry looked up at the battlements and lighted windows, trepidation filling her heart for the very first time. She wasn't sure now that this was a good idea. The castle looked.....creepy in the dark, and her fear started to overwhelm her. Dragon sensed her fear and slithered higher on her shoulders to whisper in her ear. Draco noticed the tension in Harry's shoulders suddenly leave, and her hand reached back to caress his fingers. They didn't want to hold hands here; things would be bad enough without sparking some kind of controversy their first day. After walking for what seemed like forever, they finally reached the entrance to the castle. Hagrid turned to the first years and cautioned them to behave. They then swept into the castle and toward the Great Hall. The gigantic oak doors swung open on four long tables going from front to back of the room. At the front of the room stood a raised dais, where a table sat for the professors of the school. In front of the table sat an old stool with a battered and torn hat sitting on it. The first years were led silently into the room, toward the dais. Harry saw the old man with the long white hair and beard sitting in the center of the table. She eyed him suspiciously as he stood and approached the lectern. He then introduced himself as Headmaster Albus Dumbledore. Harry's eyes widened and her mouth dropped open at this revelation. He then introduced the seated professors, and Harry's eyes were drawn to the pale man sitting toward the end of the table. He had long greasy black hair, black piercing eyes and a hooked nose. Draco nudged her and told her that the man on the end was actually his godfather, and Potions Master. He was also their potions teacher. His name was Severus Snape. Harry watched him for a while, liking the darkness that emanated from the man.

Dumbledore gave way for McGonagal, who introduced the Sorting Hat. The battered hat on the stool suddenly started to move; then it started to sing.

Darkness comes on quiet feet

Emerald eyes a secret holds

Courage hopes to power unseat

Watch as the battle unfolds

Past bright, future dim

Death in the silvery eyes

Faith will not protect him

As the crumbling present dies.

Everyone in the great hall gasped as the hat finished its song. It was incredibly short, which was unusual. Even more unusual was the fact that it wasn't in the least cryptic. Everyone speculated about what was going to happen, and to whom. McGonagal shook herself, and started calling names.

"Abbott, Hannah!"

"Bell, Katie!"

"Brown, Lavender!" With each name, the child went up to the stool and sat, where the hat was placed on the head. There would be silence, and then the hat shouted out the house that child was to belong to, whether it was Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, Slytherin, or Gryffindor. As hoped, as each of Harry's friends went under the hat, they were sorted into Slytherin. Then came Harry's turn. She slowly approached the stool, and sat on it with some trepidation. The hat was placed on her head, and instantly a voice sounded in her head.

Hmm. Not what everyone was expecting, eh?

Please, don't tell anyone what I really am.

I am not permitted to tell student secrets. You are safe, little one. But where to place you....such a conundrum. You have great courage

and loyalty befitting a Gryffindor. But you also have the slyness and cunning to be a Slytherin. You would benefit greatly from either house, but I sense your loyalties are to Slytherin.

“Slytherin!” the hat shouted. A raucous cheer rose from the Slytherin table, and Draco and her friends beamed ecstatically at her. She grinned back and almost threw the hat on the floor in her excitement to join her mates. The Gryffindor table looked bitterly disappointed, having expected that the famous Harry Potter would be sorted to their house.

“It’s rigged,” Weasel grumbled to the bushy-haired girl next to him. She looked scathingly at him and proceed to point out loudly and emphatically that it was impossible to influence or rig the Sorting Hat. According to *Hogwarts: A History*, the special magic surrounding the Hat was ancient and could not be tampered with. Weasel just groaned and rolled his eyes, tuning out the know-it-all’s screeching. He glared over at the Slytherin table, watching as Malfoy fawned all over the Chosen One. He growled under his breath, his blue eyes glittering with undisguised malice and hatred. Harry felt the rage emanating from the Gryffindor table, and looked over. Her green orbs met his blue, and narrowed and darkened threateningly. His eyes widened, and he quickly looked down at the table, trembling at the unadulterated rage in those snapping emerald eyes.

Harry then turned back to Draco and questioned him.

“Why does that red-headed Weasel hate you so much?” Draco snorted inelegantly and glanced over at the offending boy.

“His family and ours have been feuding for centuries. The hatred is long-ingrained in his family, even though I’m pretty sure that they do not even know now why they’re supposed to hate us. We’ve been trying to put aside the feud for ages now, but they refuse to let it go. Stay away from him. He’s very.....unstable and unpredictable.”

“You don’t have to worry, Dray. There’s no way I’m ever setting foot near that red haired Weasel. I don’t much care for the Einstein that’s sitting next to him, either. I...get a hinky feeling from her.” Harry observed the two Gryffindors with narrowed eyes, distrust evident in

every line of her face. She looked up suddenly when platters full of food magically appeared on the table in front of her. As she hadn't eaten much for several days, she dug in, ravenously devouring whatever her fork could spear next. Draco looked on with shock and a little horror, a small voice in the back of his mind telling him that he'd have to teach her how to act like a proper lady.

Everyone felt thoroughly sated after the great feast, and in small groups started to filter out of the Great Hall. The house Prefects corralled their charges and led them to their common rooms. Harry fell in line with Draco, the rest of the group protectively circling the pair. They walked on in companionable silence to the Dungeons, where their common room was located. They were given the password, which was fiendfyre, and they went through the door and into a large living space decorated in silver and green. Comfortable couches and chairs surrounded a humongous fireplace, and seating and study areas were sprinkled throughout the rest of the common room. Two sets of stairs ascended on opposite sides of the room, one going to the girl's dorm and one going to the boy's. As everyone believed that Harry was male, she was expected to sleep in the boy's dorm. Everyone sat in the common room, waiting for the Head of House to come in and give the rules. They didn't have to wait long.

Draco's eyes lit up when he saw Snape walk into the room. He nodded imperceptibly at his godson, and in a clipped voice explained the rules of the house, as well as the rules of Hogwarts. As he turned to leave, Draco approached him.

"I need to talk to you, Sev. It's very important." Draco's eyes held hidden meaning that Snape picked up on.

"Very well. Come with me." Snape led him to the corridor outside the potions class, where they would be able to have some privacy.

"What do you think about Harry Potter being sorted to our house?" Draco asked first thing. Snape's eyebrow lifted sardonically, and he gave his godson a half smile.

"I think whatever gods are there are out of their tree. The savior of the wizarding world in our house. He will be so easy to corrupt." There

was a glint of amusement in the professor's eyes as he said this. Unfortunately, Draco found it to be no laughing matter.

"Listen, Uncle Sev. You be gentle. I don't want you hurting Harry. I don't want to have to hurt you in return." The dangerous glint in those silver eyes was truly frightening, and Snape quailed for a moment. But only for a moment.

"Do not think to threaten me, Draco," Snape snarled. His lip curled in undisguised fury that his godson could cause him to fear.

"It's not a threat, Sev. It's a promise. But that's not why I need to talk to you. I sort of need a favor." Snape's eyebrows rose in surprise, and a smirk graced his face at his godson's chutzpah in asking for something right after he threatened the man. But, that was a Malfoy for you. Snape nodded, listening.

"Harry is....not what anyone expects. First off, she's a girl, but she wants everyone to continue to believe she's male. Don't ask," Draco stated as he raised his hand to forestall the obvious questions rolling through the teacher's head. "She needs somewhere more private to sleep. Issues with her past, which I'm not at liberty to divulge, dictate that she sleep away from the others. Is there anything you can do?"

Snape thought for a moment. His curiosity was peaked by the mystery surrounding the Boy Who Lived-well, make that Girl Who Lived-and he was looking forward to getting the child in his class. He wanted to see what was under that unruly mop of hair. What was behind those astonishing green eyes. Draco's attitude made it more imperative that Snape discover the secrets. Draco's eyes narrowed at the speculative gleam in the teacher's eyes, but he wisely bit his tongue, hoping Uncle Sev could come through for the girl.

"Come, Draco. I wish to meet this child, and see if there's anything to be done. Perhaps we could talk to the headmaster...." Draco interrupted before Snape could finish that thought.

"No. Dumbledore already knows what she is. When we went to pick her up from the Leaky Cauldron, he was already there, trying to approach her. He didn't say anything when we arrived. Just left. I'll

bring Harry by your office sometime tomorrow and, if she'd like to, she can explain what's going on. Just know this....You-Know-Who didn't mark this girl. It was not he who put that scar on her face." Snape's eyes widened at this revelation, and suspicions about the headmaster started to surface again. Suspicions Snape had buried because of the history of the man.

"Very well. Take me to her. I'd like to meet her." With that, Draco and the professor went to the Slytherin common room to talk to Harry. As they stepped through the door, they were surprised to see the common room empty, save for one lone child with disheveled black hair and vivid green eyes. She looked at the professor speculatively as Draco took a seat near her. Dragon had found her way to the back of the couch, basking in the heat of the fire. Snape took a thickly padded green chair to the left of the couch, and met those speculative green eyes with his obsidian ones. There was no challenge or threat in his dark gaze, and slowly, Harry relaxed. She smiled tentatively at the dour man, and his eyebrows lifted in curiosity.

"Ms. Potter," his deep voice drawled. Harry started and looked at Draco anxiously. He immediately took her hand and calmed her, telling her that Snape was safe. She nodded, took a deep breath, and looked back at the professor.

"Hello, professor Snape. Pleased to meet you." She didn't rise or offer her hand, but she was polite and circumspect. Snape's estimation of her rose a fraction.

"Draco tells me that you do not wish to reveal your gender to anyone. Care to tell me why?"

"Not at this time, and not here," she replied softly. There was a dark, wounded look to her face, and her eyes were haunted by shadows. Snape's brain spun at the implications.

"Indeed. Tomorrow being Saturday, would you like to come to my office around ten? We could discuss your arrangements then. Draco may come as well, since he is aware of everything."

"Thank you. I'd like that. Dray tells me you're his godfather, and I'd like to get to know you. I'm learning about his parents as well, and his friends are great. I feel safe with them...." She trailed off as memories flooded her. Her face paled and her lips trembled. The professor watched this reaction with concern, wondering at the fear in the girl's face.

The power swirling from the frail-looking girl was stifling. Snape gasped at the energy, his face flushing at the feel of the power swirling around him. Draco smiled softly as his magic connected with hers. He stroked the back of her hand and gentled her as you would a skittish colt. The fear faded from her face, and the power slowly receded. The professor was left trembling, awe clearly visible in his visage as he stared at the girl.

"Sev? Is there any way we can secure private quarters for her without Dumbledore knowing?" Snape shook himself and looked at the pair. He pondered for a moment, then his face brightened....well, as bright as a snarky Potions Master's face can get....and he looked again at the girl.

"Hogwarts is alive," he stated simply. The two children gaped at him in disbelief. "She is able to alter herself to fit the needs of the headmaster. However, with the incredible power I feel from you," nodding at Harry, "I feel that you would also be able to bend the castle to your will. All you need to do is think of what you want, and she'll provide it. Might I suggest that you also inform the castle that you do not wish for Dumbledore to know of the secret quarters. The castle is obligated to inform the Headmaster of changes and power use that he has not sanctioned. All you have to do is touch the walls of the castle to communicate with her."

Harry looked at Snape as if he was joking. When she saw the lack of humor on his face, she realized he wasn't trying to trick her. She nodded once and went over to the wall by the entrance. She tentatively touched it, but jerked back as if shocked. The power thrumming through these walls was phenomenal. Her green eyes darkened in pleasure as she again touched the walls, connecting with the ancient and powerful magic. She closed her eyes and took a



deep, meditative breath. Then she began to communicate with the soul of Hogwarts.

Hello. My name is Harry.

Hello. I am the soul of Hogwarts. I am very pleased to meet you. I am enjoying the power with which you are filled. It is very....intoxicating.

Thank you. I know that you follow one master while you are occupied, but I really could use a favor from you.

If it is within my ability to grant it, it is yours. I only ask that you touch the walls once in a while and share this marvelous energy with me.

Done. I need a private room here in the Slytherin dungeons, and I need for it to be completely undetectable. Can you.....that is.....would I be able to set up some Muggle appliances in it?

I do not have use for, nor capability for electrical current; however, I can make adjustments to the Muggle appliances so that they run on magical energy.

Thank you.

It is my pleasure Harry. I feel great damage and harm have befallen you, but I see that your soul will mend here. Take care.

Thank you.

She took her hands from the walls, and sighed heavily, exhaustion setting in. She staggered toward the couch, and Draco leapt to his feet to help her. She leaned heavily into him as he guided her to the couch in front of the fire. He sat at the end and had her lay across the rest of it, her head pillowed on his lap. Snape watched this with hooded eyes, the wheels spinning madly in his brain. He took his leave, walking back to his offices, a pensive look on his face. He had felt the power emanating from the child, and he also felt the spike in the magical energy the castle contained. He knew Dumbledore would also feel it, as he was connected to the castle. He hurried back to his

office to wait for the inevitable fire call about the energy flux from the dungeons.

Almost as soon as Snape returned to his office, the floo signaled a firecall. Dumbledore's smiley face poked from the fireplace, his eyes twinkling in the green glow.

"Severus, my boy," he chirped. It took everything in Snape not to snort and roll his eyes. He absolutely hated that the Headmaster greeted him this way. "I felt an exponential amount of magic vibrate through the walls of Hogwarts a few moments ago, coming from the Slytherin dungeons. Care to elaborate?"

"I apologise, Headmaster," the Professor responded without hesitation. "It seems that one of the students" and here he injected as much venom as possible into the word, "acquired a parent's wand. Since the magical signatures in this particular family are so similar, the student was able to utilise the wand. The student aimed a rather nasty curse at a spider on the wall of the common room and unfortunately let loose with rather more power and force than this student intended. I had to repair a great deal of damage to the walls, and the student will be spending the next three years with me in detention."

Dumbledore looked askance at the Professor, knowing he couldn't come out and call the man a liar, but having grave doubts about the veracity of the tale. However, as it was late, the Headmaster felt he didn't really need to do something about it at the moment.

"Fine, fine. Just come by my office tomorrow afternoon, and we can better clear up this matter. Bring Mr. Potter with you as well." With that, the Headmaster's head disappeared. Severus heaved a great sigh and sat at his desk, thinking about the upcoming meeting. He wasn't quite sure what Dumbledore wanted with the girl, but he felt that things weren't quite on the level. He vowed to keep his eyes open and his ear to the ground.

In the common room, Harry had drifted off in the safety and comfort of Draco's presence. All too soon, she jerked awake, feeling the castle's subtle shift as the new room was readied. She turned to the blonde and smiled sleepily.

“My room’s ready. Want to see?” She didn’t wait for an answer; she grabbed her snake and headed for the corner under the stairs to the boy’s dorm. There, a very subtly hidden door awaited entrance. She put her hand on it and murmured the password. She then turned to Draco and bade him do the same, making sure that he was keyed to the door as well. They pushed through the entrance and into a spacious room. Against the far wall was a canopy bed, done in black. Black lacquer dressers and a vanity were also sprinkled about the room. The floor was covered in thick black plush carpet.

A large stereo CD player, with six foot speakers sat in one corner of the room. It was this that captured Draco’s attention. He wandered toward it, looking puzzled and a little apprehensive. Harry came up behind him and pressed the power switch. Immediately, music boomed from the speakers, startling the boy badly and making him leap away from the contraption. Unfortunately, Harry was right behind him, and this just served to knock both of them to the floor. The thick carpet cushioned the fall for the most part; however, Harry was smaller than Draco, and emitted a pained groan as his heavier body landed on top of her. He raised up on his hands immediately and looked down at her. Silver eyes met emerald, and a frisson of heat raced through the children. Both blushed bright red, and Draco hurriedly clambered to his feet. He extended a hand to help the girl up, pulling with a little too much force, causing her to stumble into him. He again put his arms around her to steady her, and she looked at him shyly before reaching up to place another kiss on his cheek. She left his arms quickly and went to the common room to retrieve her trunk and knapsack. She dragged them to the room, and Draco helped her unpack her belongings and get settled.

She unpacked the CDs from her knapsack, placing them in the shelves by the stereo. Draco picked up a few, looking at the sleeve art. Most of them were by bands with odd names like Korn, Disturbed, Iron Maiden, and Dir En Grey. He shook his head and looked at her.

“Have you any wizarding music? Like something from the Weird Sisters?” he asked.

“No. I didn’t know about the wizarding world, and I’ve never heard the music.”

"My father gets tickets to all sorts of concerts and entertainments. Would you like to come with me some time?" She nodded, her green eyes sparkling with anticipation.

"Well, it's late. I guess I'd better get to the dorm. I'll see you in the morning."

"Good night, Dray."

A piercing scream rent the silence in the common room. Every child was jerked out of sound slumber to the terrified cries in the night. Many of them thought a screaming ghost was haunting the common room. Draco and his friends all knew who it was and flew down the stairs. Draco ran to the door in the corner and put his hand on it, whispering the password. The door quickly opened, and he ran across the floor to the bed, where the small body was thrashing around and screaming her horror to the room. There were no words, just horrified cries and screams. Draco sat on the edge of the bed and placed his hand on her shoulder. She sat bolt upright, her eyes snapping open, the emeralds glazed and panicked. She turned to look at him, a soundless cry on her lips, then threw herself into his arms, sobbing her terror and grief. Her body shook so badly that it made the bed vibrate, sending shockwaves down the boy's spine as he held her tightly in his arms. The rest of the gang entered the room and surrounded the bed, lending their strength to the girl on the bed.

"Is she going to be alright?" Pansy was the first to ask. Draco could only look at her and shrug.

"Maybe we should get Snape," Blaise suggested, worry ghosting his face. Vince immediately made for the door. The others sat around the bed, reaching out to touch some part of her, to offer comfort. It was only a few moments when Snape appeared in the doorway and took in the scene before him. He could actually smell the fear the girl was radiating. He frowned deeply, only just now realizing that the scars must go very deep indeed.

Snape quickly moved to the bed, a vial of Dreamless Sleep in his hand. As he approached, Harry's eyes widened in terror and she

flinched against the headboard. Draco quickly grabbed her hand and tried to calm her.

“I mean you no harm, Ms. Potter,” Snape said gently. “I have some potion here that I think you would benefit from tonight. Please drink it so you can have some uninterrupted sleep.” He attempted to hand her the vial, but past bitter experience with Dursley made her extremely suspicious of anyone handing her unknown things to ingest. She backed further into the corner of the bed, against the headboard, the panic just below the surface. Snape frowned deeply at her reaction, which only served to increase her fear. She started to moan and tremble again, and Draco reacted without thinking. He crawled up into the bed and leaned against the headboard, reached his arm around her and pulled her gently into his lap. She cuddled against his chest as he calmly caressed her back and carded his fingers through her hair. He murmured comforting words to her, the vibrations from his chest tickling her ear. She began to calm down, and looked at Snape with less fear in her eyes.

“It’s alright, Harry,” Draco said. “It’s called Dreamless Sleep, and it will help you. I promise, nothing will happen to you while we’re here. We will protect you.”

“Will you stay here with me? At least until I fall asleep.” The blonde looked at his godfather, worry in his silver eyes. Snape nodded imperceptibly, and Draco agreed. Harry took the potion, and downed it in one gulp. She didn’t grimace at the taste. There was no reaction whatsoever. Snape’s worry grew as he observed the almost detached way she was coping. Her eyelids started to droop as the potion took effect, and Snape herded the rest of the children out of the room, closing the door behind himself as he left.

Draco gently scooted both of them down into the bed. He pulled the covers up over their bodies, and Harry curled into him, already asleep. He sighed deeply, still playing with her messy curls. He stared up at the canopy for a time, sleepless, disquieting thoughts running through his head. He needed to get her to talk to Snape tomorrow. He needed an adult’s perspective on how to help her heal. And he needed to talk to her about the pre-commitment bonding ceremony. He needed to know that she had a safe place to go when the holidays arrived. He

knew that time was not on their side, so he had to move quickly. Thinking about devoting his life to the raven-haired child, he slowly drifted to sleep, an unexpected but sweet small smile on his lips as he slept.

Harry woke up slowly, her face pressed into someone's shoulder. The nightmares came flooding back, and her eyes snapped open in panic. She froze as she felt the warm body next to her, fear making her immobile. Her emerald eyes slowly lifted and encountered a silvery gaze. A heated glance passed between the children before Draco cleared his throat. Harry jumped at the sound and sat up quickly, the panic slowly receding. She saw that they both still had their clothes on, and her relief was overwhelming.

"Um...yeah...what are you doing here?" Harry stammered. Her face flushed bright red. Draco, for his part, also sported a lovely pink blush.

"You had a nightmare last night. You were screaming. My friends and I came down to make sure you were alright. We couldn't seem to get you to calm down enough, so Uncle Sev gave you some potion to help you sleep. You asked me to stay. I did."

Harry shifted and climbed off the bed. Draco sat up and watched her for a moment, gauging her reactions and her demeanor. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he felt that something was off about the girl. Before he could ask her, there was a knock on the door.

"Dray, Harry, it's me, Millie. Professor Snape is here, and he says that he needs to talk to you both."

"OK Millie. We will be out shortly," Harry replied. She grabbed yet another pair of baggy jeans and a flannel shirt and went into the bathroom to get cleaned up and change. Draco rose from the bed and walked to the outer door.

"I'll meet you in the common room, Harry," he said as he opened the door. An affirmative sound was the only response he got, and he left, closing the door behind him. His thoughts were full of the girl and the nightmare as he ascended the stairs to the boy's dorm. He changed as quickly as he could and went back downstairs. Snape was sitting

in the same chair he had occupied the previous night. Draco sat on the couch, and moments later Harry exited her room. She looked pale and nervous, and sat in the chair opposite Snape. The blonde glanced at her, worried, but she refused to meet his eyes. The professor's eyebrow quirked, and his lips tightened in annoyance. He stood and beckoned the children to follow him. They left the common room and went to Snape's private office . He bade them sit in the chairs opposite his desk, and he sat down in the chair behind it. He looked at the children for a moment, then focused his dark gaze on Harry.

"Ms. Potter. With your permission, I would like to take a look at some of your memories. I feel that the trauma you've appeared to suffer would be best treated if we were to know the true nature of the acts. I do not wish that you relive these memories by retelling, and I feel that you would not be completely forthcoming in details. I am by no means doing this to become a voyeur to your pain. I merely wish to help you work through the trauma, to alleviate some of the symptoms, to relieve you of the nightmares. Will you permit me to see?"

Harry gave a small nod and Snape pointed his wand at her and whispered "Legilimens". Instantly, he was sucked into her mind, looking up at a very large Vernon Dursley. His face was red and sweating. His naked body, with it's rotund and bloated belly, hovered over the small form on the bed. His erection was barely visible, buried in the belly fat that hung below his belt, but the pain inflicted when penetration occurred was horrifying.

Suddenly, he was careened to a scrawny, red-faced screaming woman. Hands beat her about the head as a voice raged. "You should have never been brought here! You are evil! A freak! A filthy whore! It's your fault that my precious Vernon does those things to you! You deserve every filthy thing he does to you! No decent woman lets a man do to them what you let him do!"

Hazy, fuzzy images of a fat face. Muzzy sounds filtering in. Vague memories of pain....rectal pain.

Snape backed out of her mind as gently as he could. He had seen enough. Though the memories he had been able to access were few,



they spoke of long-term repeated abuse by both Vernon and Petunia Dursley. And the child was made to feel that it was her fault the abuse occurred. Harry sat in the chair, weeping softly, looking shattered and broken. Draco had leapt out of his chair when Snape had screamed involuntarily at the memories, and he knelt by her chair, rubbing her back, speaking soft, soothing nonsense words in her ear as she cried. He looked up at Severus, whose face was still pale and shell-shocked, a question in his silver eyes. The Professor visibly shook himself and looked back into his godson's eyes, his own obsidian orbs troubled and greatly saddened. Snape bowed his head for a moment, trying to get himself under control, before he raised his head. His eyes had cleared, and a great and boiling rage had invaded them. They darkened even further as he watched the fragile child weep.

For many long moments, the only sound in the office was her soft sobs. Eventually, she got herself under control enough to allow Snape to gently question her. The first question, however, came as a complete shock.

"Tell me, Ms. Potter, what you know of Lord Voldemort?" Bafflement colored her green eyes as she looked back at the man.

"As I told Draco, I've never met this Volde-whosis you keep talking about. My scar was given to me by my cousin when I was five. I got hit in the head with a toy aeroplane, the cut became very infected, and this is the scar that developed. I've never faced any killing curse, and I have absolutely no knowledge of my parents, except for their oh-so-witty naming me Harry." Snape pondered this information, thinking about what Dumbledore had been saying. There had been reports of attacks on on the wizarding world. Many muggleborn and halfblood wizards and witches had been killed, and the deaths blamed on Lord Voldemort. Stories of Death Eater squads roaming many wizarding communities were spread all over Britain, and extending throughout Europe. There were even some reports of Death Eater squads killing in the Americas. All blamed on Lord Voldemort. Yet here was this child, the Savior of the Wizarding World, who was not only not the Boy Who Lived, but had never faced down and defeated Lord Voldemort. Had never even heard of him.

“Draco, I need you and your friends to start making some quiet inquiries into this. I’m sure your parents will be able to ferret out some information on Dumbledore and what he’s doing. I suspect that he’s behind all of this. We just need to find out why.” Draco nodded quickly, still stroking Harry’s back. She didn’t move away from him. In fact, she leaned closer to the contact. He stood up, sat in his chair, and beckoned her to sit on his lap. She readily left her chair and climbed into his lap, snuggling into his chest. He carded his fingers through her ebony locks as she started to drowse.

“Ms. Potter, Lucius Malfoy contacted me shortly after your arrival to the school to speak to me about a pre-commitment bonding ceremony. They wish to initiate a pre-arrangement between yourself and Draco for marriage when you are both of age. The pre-commitment bonding ceremony is a blood ceremony, and is binding and permanent. If you enter into this, you are essentially guaranteeing that you will marry Draco when you both are of age. It is unbreakable, except in death. They wish to protect you from your family, and they also wish to protect you from the Headmaster. I was given to understand that he made a visit to you before school. What transpired between you?”

“Yeah, he came to see me. I don’t know what he wanted, but he looked at me like Uncle Vernon always looked at me...” Harry shuddered uncontrollably, and Draco’s arms tightened around her. She breathed deeply, got herself under control, and continued. “This bonding ceremony....How soon can we do it? I really, really don’t ever want to go back there again. And what will happen to me and Draco? Will it hurt us in any way? Will it hurt him? I don’t want to do anything that will hurt him....”

“The bonding ceremony will not harm either one of you. It will allow you to share magic, and, if it binds your souls, it will allow you to always be in constant contact with each other. It will act as a soul mate bond if your magic and souls are compatible. Neither of you will be able to bond with anyone else. You will not be able to interact with anyone else in a sexual or romantic way. This will cause severe pain and anguish to both of you. Once bonded, you will be completely protected from everyone and everything. No one will be able to harm either one of you, and no one will ever be able to take your power. If

this becomes a soul mate bond, the two of you would be unstoppable. I can contact Lucius and have him set up the ceremony. I will contact you when the time is appropriate.”

They were dismissed, but before they left the office, Snape spoke up once again.

“Ms. Potter, we are to meet with the Headmaster later this afternoon. I will come for you when the time comes. Try not to worry.” Harry smiled at him and the children left. Snape sat at his desk for a time, thinking about what he saw, what he heard, and the broken child that had sat in his office. Eventually he got up and made the all-important floo call to Malfoy. He was over the moon at the news, and informed Snape that he’d have everything ready in a fortnight.

A/N: I want to thank all the people who are keeping up with the story.....\*teardrop\* \*teardrop\* you make me so very happy.....

The song is Down With the Sickness by that wonderful band Disturbed.

---

The Slytherins headed for their common room after lunch. Harry hadn't been feeling up to socializing, so she told Draco and the others to go ahead without her. As they neared the door, they heard some strange noises coming from the room. Draco said the password, the door opened, and loud, crashing drumbeats greeted the stunned students. Suddenly, a voice sounding tortured and in pain belted out lyrics.

Drowning deep in my sea of loathing

Broken your servant I bleed

(Will you give it to me)

It seems what's left of my human side

Is slowly changing in me

(Will you give it to me)

Looking at my own reflection

When suddenly it changes

Violently it changes

There is no turning back

Now that you've woken up the demon

In me.....

Draco walked slowly over to Harry's door and placed his hand on it, saying the password. The door opened to reveal the girl, standing in front of the stereo. Her head was down, her bangs covering her eyes as she glared at the stereo. She was singing along with the music at the top of her lungs and she looked furious. The blonde was startled, and quickly rushed over to the girl, thinking that someone had done something. He touched her arm gently and she jumped in the air and shrieked, her eyes wide. She quickly slammed the off button on the stereo and clutched at her chest.

"Geez, Draco, give a girl a heart attack why don't you?" she huffed at him. He grinned at her, and she heard muffled laughter coming from the doorway.

"I'm sorry," Draco chortled. "You just looked so mad, I thought something was wrong. I thought someone had said or done something. Didn't mean to scare you." He couldn't keep the grin off of his face, and her blush got darker. "Why were you looking so mad, anyway?"

"It's the music. In the muggle world, it's called metal, or hard rock. It's violent, aggressive and full of rage. And it feeds the blackness in my soul. I don't know how to explain it except that when I vent to the music, I feel a little better. I just needed to vent. I'm sorry if I made you think something was wrong. I'll have to get headphones and try not to sing anymore, 'kay?"

"Actually, it didn't sound too bad," the boy admitted sheepishly. "I'm going to have to check some of this stuff out." Harry grinned, knowing that he was trying, and she appreciated it. She looked back at the door, where most of the Slytherins had cleared away, just leaving the core group. She invited them in, and they all gathered on the bed, where they proceeded to teach her how to play Exploding Snap. Draco and Harry sat close, their knees brushing. They'd turn and grin at each other, and their hands accidentally brushed together all too often. Eventually, Snape showed up at the outer common room door to pick Harry up for the meeting with Dumbledore.

Draco walked her to the door, and this time he bent down and brushed his lips against her cheek. She blushed, smiled and darted quickly out the door. The Professor noticed the blush and smile, and quirked an eyebrow at the girl. She shrugged and started walking up the hall. Snape reached out a hand to restrain her and she ducked away from the touch. Nodding to himself, he withdrew the hand and they walked side by side, a small distance between them. They didn't speak the entire time they walked to the Headmaster's gargoyle guarding the office. When they got there, Snape looked at the gargoyle and mumbled "M&M's" to it, his face flushing in embarrassment. The dotty old fool, he thought. The passwords get more asinine every year. The gargoyle leapt aside and the revolving stairs came into view. The pair climbed aboard, with Harry getting on first, and Snape following a couple risers behind. They reached the top, where the professor rapped smartly on the office door. A muffled "Come in" sounded from the other side, and the pair entered the eccentric office.

Harry looked around, her eyes glancing off of the various objects spinning, hopping and gyrating all over the office. She raised an eyebrow at the old man, a little astonished at the almost childlike quality of the office décor. He bade them sit in the chairs in front of the desk. The pair sat and looked expectantly at the man behind the desk. He glanced quickly at Snape before focusing his attention on the girl. He looked at her over his spectacles, his blue eyes twinkling with that same predatory gleam they held at the Leaky Cauldron. This time, Snape was on hand to see it, and it caused an uncomfortable twisting in his belly. He wants her, Snape realized. He really, desperately wants her. Oh, this is not good. Not good at all. He glanced at Harry, and she looked back at the Potions Master, a speculative gleam in those remarkable green eyes. She looked back at the Headmaster and relaxed into her chair. He's a known quantity, Snape realized. She almost knows what to expect from him. No surprises. This is going to be interesting. The Professor sat back and prepared to enjoy the ride, a small smirk gracing his face.

"Well, Mr. Potter, how are you today?" Dumbledore asked. Harry just lifted a brow and continued to look at him with that cool speculation. Just when it seemed she wouldn't say anything, she opened her mouth and surprised everyone.

“Please, sir, don’t continue to pretend that you don’t know that I’m not a Mr. You may call me Ms. Potter. What do you want?” Harry’s bluntness was shocking, but it amused Snape enormously. He had to fight to hold back the snort that threatened to break free. Dumbledore ignored his struggle, his blue eyes sharpening and temporarily losing that predatory twinkle. He glared at her for a moment, before that hunter’s gleam returned to his eyes.

“Quite true, Ms. Potter. I do know your gender. I just want to offer you my assistance in getting you ready for your battle with Voldemort.” He smiled benignly, that gleam never leaving his eyes. Harry glanced again at Snape, who twitched an eyebrow in response. She understood the meaning, her eyes blinking slowly, then turned back to the Headmaster.

“Thank you for your gracious offer, sir, but I’ll have to decline. I’ve had someone else offer to train me, and I’ve accepted.” The gleam dimmed in his eyes, and he frowned heavily as he assimilated her statement.

“May I ask who?”

“No, you may not. That is not your concern. I appreciate your desire to look after my safety, but I didn’t need you to protect me from the monsters you left me with, and I don’t need you to protect me now. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have things to do to prepare for class on Monday.” With that, she rose from the chair, her green eyes snapping with rage and the power she contained swirling around the room. Many of the gyroscopes fell over, inoperable, and some of Dumbledore’s trinkets shattered. Snape’s eyes widened, then he rose and followed the girl out the door. Dumbledore sat for a few moments, looking at the damage to some of his favorite toys. He then raised his wand and waved it to repair the damage. Nothing happened. His toys remained broken. He scowled and tried again, waving the wand harder. Still nothing. He clenched his teeth and bit back a scream of frustration, and waved his wand, breaking some more of his toys in his rage.

Snape looked at the girl with a great deal of admiration. He had never seen anyone go head-to-head with Dumbledore and win. They walked back to the common rooms in companionable silence. As they reached the door, Harry stuck out her hand. Snape, startled, grasped it in his own and looked at her.

“Thank you for going with me. You kept me focused in there. I appreciate the help you’re offering, and I would like to ask you to teach me, along with Lucius. I’m sure there are things you know that would be very beneficial to me.”

“Ms. Potter, I would be delighted to teach you. As this is your first year, we will have to start slowly, allow you to build up your power and control. After your bonding ceremony, you and Draco will train together. We will discuss a training schedule after the ceremony.”

“Thank you, Professor. And please call me Harry.” She smiled at him and pushed the door open. As the door closed, she heard his invitation to call him Severus. Waiting on the other side of the door was her golden boy, along with Dragon, who was draped around the blonde’s shoulders. He looked up and grinned at her. He patted the couch beside him, and she gratefully sat down.

“How did it go?” he asked. His silver eyes took in the tension in her face, and he grew concerned.

“Well, the Headmaster offered to train me to defeat Voldemort. I told him someone else promised to train me. He looked at me with such want in his eyes. It really pissed me off. I got mad enough that I broke some of his toys. I could feel him try to fix them, but he couldn’t.” Here she grinned an unholy grin. “He broke some more of his toys.”

“What about Uncle Sev? Is he in trouble?”

“No. In fact, after our bonding ceremony, he’s going to set up a training schedule and train us together. This should be very interesting.....”

Harry had chosen to stay in the common rooms over the weekend, allowing the house-elves to bring her food. After that first lunch on



Saturday, her gang decided to stay with her, and they had had a grand old time laughing and playing. Greg and Vince had even instigated a fairly serious food fight on Sunday night at dinner. The other Slytherins returned from the Great Hall to find the seven children, covered with various degrees of potato, chocolate, whipped cream, soup, and other assorted foods, rolling on the floor, laughing like mad hyenas. The Prefects just looked on in horror, before shaking their heads, amused smiles on their faces. The rest of the dorms' occupants carefully (and some not so carefully as a fourth year with the unfortunate name of Exasperilla Bottomly slipped in a puddle of pudding and landed quite hard on her arse) dodged the food and the mess and climbed toward their respective dorms.

Harry was still picking peas out of her hair the next morning as she made ready for classes. After that first night, she was able to sleep more soundly and the nightmares were not as severe. She woke up whimpering once or twice, but the screaming she'd done in the first night did not recur. I guess Severus' trick on Saturday helped to exorcise some of the demons. I guess it also helps that I really feel safe for the first time in my entire life. And that I have real friends for the first time ever. I hope this never ends.....She sighed heavily as she finished dressing. There was a gentle tap on the door, and it opened to the face of the boy who was slowly stealing her heart. A beatific smile bloomed on her face, and her emerald eyes lit with joy. Draco saw the light, and his own light of joy responded. He held out his hand, and she ran across the room to take it. They stood for a moment, silver looking into green, smiling gently, before they turned and entered the common rooms. The entire Slytherin dorm had waited for the pair, and as one unified group they exited the common room to go to breakfast. Since her arrival and sorting, something had changed in the dynamics of the castle. People who had never felt the need to get involved with anything other than their own agenda suddenly became protective of Harry, and by extension, Draco. There was an unspoken, yet strongly felt, need to be a buffer between the two children and the rest of the world, and the Slytherin rose admirably to the challenge.

The Great Hall on Monday was abuzz with excitement and activity as the Slytherin entered. Everyone looked toward the door, and the buzz quieted for a moment. Harry leaned over to Draco and mumbled

something from the corner of her mouth. He leaned his head down in a gesture asking her to repeat what she said.

“Why is everyone staring?”

“Well, they are trying to catch sight of the Hero of the Wizarding World. They wish to see the Boy Who Lived.” A smirk graced his lovely face. Harry snorted inelegantly.

“Well,” and here she craned her neck, trying to look behind herself and the group, “I don’t see any Boy Who Lived here. Must be delusional.” Everyone laughed and they continued on to their house table to eat. Whispering, followed by murmuring, escalating into talking chased them to the table, and the Hall returned to the quasi-normal state of the first day of school.

As they ate, Professor McGonagal handed out the class schedules. Harry and Draco compared notes, and found that they had every class together. They looked at each other, huge grins on their faces, silver clashing with green, both gazes filled with unholy mischief. Snape watched from the teacher’s table, his brows climbing into his hairline at the relaxed girl. The haunted look that was in her eyes when she first arrived was greatly dimmed. Occasionally, someone would accidentally brush up against her, and she would flinch. The reactions of the rest of the Slytherin around her were instantaneous; they would push the offending person away. As more people attempted to get near the girl, a wall of bodies started building around her.

Noise from the Gryffindor table attracted the attentions of Draco and Harry. They looked over to see the red-head stand up from his bench with a furious look on his face. Granger, seated next to him, had her mouth open, haranguing the young man about staying put. She had the grace to blush when the boy looked at her and hissed, “You’re not my mother nor are you my friend. Leave me alone!” He looked back at the Slytherin table, rage evident in his blue eyes, and rounded the end of the table, marching toward the snakes. Dumbledore looked on with approval in his face; Snape started to rise to intercept the coming trouble, but Dumbledore cleared his throat, attracting the Professor’s attention. The Headmaster sharply shook his head, and the Potions

Master slowly retook his seat, worry etched into the lines of his face. The Weasel stopped at the Slytherin table, standing opposite where Harry and Draco sat, and glared for a moment.

“Dumbledore says that you’re supposed to be in Gryffindor, and that I’m supposed to take you over there. You’re not allowed to associate with this filth, so you better come with me.” He held his hand out to the girl. She looked at him for long moments, fury building in her eyes, darkening the green alarmingly. Several Slytherin in front of the offending boy stood up, creating a wall between him and the girl. The red-head tried to push them out of the way, but his hand was grabbed and twisted so that it was being pushed back against his wrist. The pain was immediate and he dropped to his knees with a gasp. Blaise, who had grabbed the hand, looked down at Weasel with contempt.

“He is Slytherin. He will stay Slytherin. Dumbledore has no say in where he is placed; only the Sorting Hat has that power. You’d best go back to your Gryffindor table and stay put.” Blaise threw the hand away from himself in disgust and sat back down. Harry looked at him and smiled with gratitude, the rage fading from her eyes. Weasel slowly climbed back to his feet, glancing at the Slytherin still standing, and stormed out of the Great Hall. Voices erupted in the silence that had encased the Hall during the altercation, and Dumbledore stormed away from the teacher’s table, furious that the girl had so much protection so quickly. He made it to his office in record time, the rage threatening to boil over. He fire called Hagrid in his hut, requesting a meeting with the half-giant immediately. Dumbledore then flooded directly to his hut, and bade the mountainous man to sit. There was fear in the large man’s eyes as he saw the fury encompassing the Headmaster’s face.

“Hagrid, please tell me how Harry Potter became friends with Draco Malfoy and the rest of his Slytherin friends. Your instructions were to keep him away from all children, until he boarded the Hogwarts Express. He was to have been friends with Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger. He was supposed to believe that Slytherins are evil, and that they are responsible for his fate. He was supposed to be easily accessible to me, easy for me to manipulate, easy for me to use. How did that particular mission fail?” By the end of the questions, the Headmaster’s voice had raised to a hectoring shout. Hagrid

flinched away from the volume of the voice, and Fang raised his head, growling at the desire for violence emanating from the old man.

“Well, Professor, it seems he had met Malfoy in Madame Malkin’s,” Hagrid began, dropping the illiterate slang that was his cover. “Somehow, Malfoy was able to gain Potter’s trust right away. I tried to tell him that Malfoy was no good, that he would be evil like his father, but Potter glared at me and wouldn’t listen. At Flourish & Blott’s, he somehow ended up friendly with the entire group. I don’t know exactly what happened; I’m unfortunately too large to go into the shop. I didn’t see anything amiss through the windows. I don’t know exactly how or when the children got there, or how they were able to convince Potter to trust them.”

“Did you leave your post at any time?”

“Erm...yes, sir, I did. One of the other members of the Order called me away to discuss some urgent business. Something may have happened in that time I was away.”

Dumbledore considered this information for a moment, casually flicking his wand. Hagrid watched the motion of the wand with great trepidation; he had no wish to be on the receiving end of an Unforgivable for his mistake.

“Very well. We will just have to somehow separate Potter from the rest of the Slytherins. We need to somehow plant doubt and mistrust in his mind. Maybe we can use Malfoy’s parents to turn Potter against their son. Maybe we could use Potter’s past to make the Malfoys turn against him. Make them believe his history will somehow damage their reputations as purebloods.” Hagrid nodded eagerly; he knew people in the Order who could get close enough to the Malfoys to plant those seeds of doubt and suspicion. Dumbledore and Hagrid gathered closer together, manufacturing the past they knew would drive Malfoy away from Potter.

Classes were a riot. For every class, Harry and Draco sat together. They were always surrounded by other Slytherin classmates, and any attempts by any other house to touch the girl was intercepted. Classmates from the other houses were at first confused, then concerned, then annoyed at being unable to get close to Dumbledore's Golden Boy. By the end of the day, rumors were flying around that the Slytherins were a cult, and that Harry Potter was being groomed to be the next human sacrifice. As the days wore on, the rumors got wilder and more vicious. Draco and the other snakes were wounded on behalf of Harry, and many, many altercations occurred defending the honor of the girl and the snakes. Harry, for her part, completely ignored what was said. Petunia's foul words and horrible slurs trained her well on how to ignore name calling. Other than the obnoxious rumors, life for Harry was pretty stable and safe.

"Mr. Potter, Mr. Malfoy, I need you to stay after class for a moment," Professor Snape drawled. The other students in the class looked at each other uneasily. If the snarky Potions Master asked you to stay after, it only meant you were doomed to days of horrible detentions, where you had to muck out slimy, smelly, disgusting cauldrons for hours. The class emptied quickly, not wanting to get caught in any sort of backlash punishment.

"Draco, your father contacted me last night. Your pre-commitment bonding ceremony is for this Saturday. That's only two days away, and there are things you both need to do to prepare. Also, we need to come up with a plausible excuse as to why Ms. Potter should be going with you to the Manor on Saturday." Snape handed a parchment to the both of them, outlining the preparations each had to make before the ceremony. "I will go and talk to the Headmaster after classes today. Hopefully, by then I will have come up with something adequate to get you out of school this weekend, Harry. I think, when you come back on Monday, that we should reveal that you are female, and pre-committed. This way, we can avoid any misunderstandings, especially when the bond solidifies between the two of you. Also, you might want to consider changing your name. I want Dumbledore on the ropes, and casting doubts about his Chosen One, and his mortal enemy, will take power away from him. There are too many murders occurring in the wizarding world to be ignored, and they're being committed in your name, based on a fairy tale an old man is telling.

We need to expose these lies and work on a way to take him down. I'm sorry, but the both of you must become the warriors for Truth."

The children nodded their understanding and left the dungeons, each contemplating the daunting tasks set before them.

Charms was the first class, that Friday, in which Harry was able to pull out her wand. They were learning the Wingardium Leviosa charm, trying to levitate a feather quill. She drew her wand from the mahogany case and the entire room gasped in awe. Draco's eyes got huge as he saw the crystal wand loosely grasped in her hand. He could feel the power thrumming around the room as she made ready to cast the charm.

"Wingardium Leviosa," she murmured softly, swishing the wand at the quill. The crystal began to glow with a quiet sapphire light, and the feather rose steadily into the air. Everyone in class watched as the feather spun gently in the air, as if on an errant breeze. Suddenly a voice from behind Harry broke the silence with a crash.

"The Boy Who Lived has to use a piece of glass as a wand?" was the incredulous gasp. "What a worthless piece of trash he is. To think we were all depending on this scum to save us all, when he can't even use a proper wand." Scorn was thick in the voice, and Harry's temper started to boil over. Her eyes darkened as her rage mounted, and the wand reflected the mood change by turning jet black. Suddenly the feather burst into fiendfyre, the flames resembling Vernon and Petunia's faces, the demons Harry had to deal with for much of her life. Quickly, before things got too out of hand, Draco grabbed Harry's wand hand and leaned over to murmur in her ear. Her eyes cleared, the wand cleared, and the fiendfyre was sucked back into the crystal shaft.

There was silence around the room for a heartbeat, then a familiar hectoring voice spoke up from the back of the room.

"That is not a piece of glass. That is a Karstjewel Wand. It is a very ancient and powerful wand, and very, very rare. It focuses and contains the power of the wizard wielding it, and feeds off of emotional energy. The color of the wand reflects the mood of the

wielder. The only wizards to wield it are those who have a magic connection to it. The wand's magical core has to match the wizard's magical core. Almost as if the wand is an extension of the soul of the wizard. Harry's very lucky to be able to wield that wand. It may be the only thing to help him defeat He Who Must Not Be Named."

Silence once again fell on the room as everyone considered Hermione's words. Then Weasel tried to reach around Harry and grab the wand. As his arm brushed against her, immense loathing radiating from the boy, the wand flared a brilliant red, suffusing Harry in the crimson glow. Weasel jerked back, his eyes rolling into the back of his head as he slithered slowly to the floor. The wand glow reached out to surround Draco, and he stiffened in his seat as power he had never felt before flooded through him. Harry and Draco remained like that for many moments as the light pulsed and throbbed like a living heartbeat. As the class watched in terror, the scar on Harry's head began to fade. Scars, wounds and imperfections, both physical and psychic, faded and disappeared. When the glow was finally sucked back into the rod, the two children looked at each other, trembling. Silver met emerald in an unspoken message. They sat there, trembling, trying to get themselves under control.

Professor Flitwick knew he had witnessed something miraculous, and so very rare as to be unearthly. He quickly dismissed the class, allowing Harry and Draco to remain to gather their scattered senses. He approached the pair slowly, looking at the remarkable crystal rod in the girl's hand. She still maintained a tight grip on the wand, and the children hadn't stopped looking into each other's eyes. He gently cleared his throat, making the children jump. They looked at him, identical eyebrows raised in an identical manner. Flitwick smiled to himself. He had witnessed a magical bonding unlike anything he'd ever seen. He knew these two children were going to be invincible, and was heartily grateful that they were on his side.

"Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Potter. Are you well?" the Professor began. At their identical affirmative nods, he continued. "You have just participated, although unknowingly, in an exceedingly rare and powerful magical bonding. Mr. Malfoy, you will now be able to wield that remarkable wand, and together you are invincible. There is something in your

magical signatures that indicated to the power of the wand that you are halves of the same soul. You are one. And you have been marked. There will be a runic symbol, represented on the wand itself, that will mark you somewhere on your persons. That is the visible proof of the bond. Congratulations!" At this, the diminutive man beamed, and left the room.

Thoughts swirled through the children's heads as they considered all that had happened, and all that was said. Draco turned to Harry, and his eyes widened. There, on the side of her neck, almost hidden by her ebony curls, was a raised scar in the shape of a runic symbol. He reached out and ran his finger over it gently. The sensation caused a shudder in the other child, and she closed her eyes in joy. She had never been touched in any other manner than brutal, and the gentle caress, along with the shivery sensation, made her heart sing. She opened her eyes and looked at the ethereal boy next to her, her eyes dark with inexpressible emotion. He saw the love in her eyes, and his turned gleaming silver in response, reflecting his own feelings for her. Her eyes glanced down, and spied the same runic scar on the side of his neck. She reached out to feather a finger over it, and he shuddered, letting out a small, breathy moan at the incredible sensations running through his body.

A throat clearing in the doorway made both children jump and look around, guilty blushes coloring their skin. Severus was standing at the doorway, a small smirk on his face. He approached them slowly, taking in the changes in their appearances, the lack of scars and the lack of fear, especially in Harry's eyes.

"You are well?" Severus asked, almost mirroring Flitwick's comments earlier. They both nodded again. "It will please you to know that, with the magical bonding, your preparations for the pre-commitment bonding are now complete. We will leave after dinner tonight so that the two of you will be well-rested for the ceremony tomorrow. I spoke to Flitwick about what happened here, and what's happening at the Manor. He is neutral in this "war" we are engaged in, so I can trust that he will not go back to the Headmaster with information.

"Harry, you seem....different. I see no fear in you. May I look?" At her nod, he once again pointed his wand at her and murmured



“Legilimens,” This time, when he went into her memories, he found them locked away. They weren’t removed or even healed, but they were isolated into a section of her memory where they would do no harm. He backed out of her memory and looked at her speculatively for a moment. She looked back, then cocked an eyebrow.

“Your memories, especially of the abuse perpetrated upon your person, have been locked away. Can you access them?” She looked down, and the green eyes dimmed as she looked within herself.

“Yes, I can. I know they’re still there, but the pain associated with them is gone. The fear, anguish and rage have also gone. It’s almost as if I’m looking at someone else’s life through a foggy window. I know these things happened to me, but they no longer define me.” Snape nodded in satisfaction and shooed the kids off to their next class. Albus is certainly going to have his hands full with these two, he thought with no small amount of glee. I cannot wait to see this.....

The rest of the day passed without further comment and dinner in the hall was noisier than usual, most of all because the students who had witnessed the Karstjewel wand in action couldn’t wait to tell the story. By the time dinner had arrived, the story had gotten so blown out of proportion that people were saying the wand had blown up professor Flitwick. It didn’t help matters that the man was so small that hardly anyone could see him over the top of the table. Harry listened in to some of the rumors with half an ear, joy and peace still singing in her veins. She could feel her magic reaching out to the blonde next to her, and she could feel his joy at the bond. Finally, finally something good in her life. She turned away from a conversation between Blaise and Pansy on the merits of morning glory conditioner to surreptitiously wipe away some errant tears. Draco caught the movement from the corner of his eye, and stroked his hand down her arm to clasp her fingers in his. She squeezed his hand gratefully and turned back to her food, having gotten her emotions under control.

As dinner was winding down, Snape materialized behind the two children, and they rose together to march out of the Great Hall behind the bat-like professor. The other students watched this procession, figuring that the kids had detention or something for the display in Charms. Trunks had already been packed for the weekend at the

Manor, and the trio walked outside the gates to Side-Along Apparate to the Malfoy estate. There, they were met by Lucius, Narcissa, and a man dressed in some kind of ceremonial robes. The robes he wore were ivory, embroidered around the neck, sleeves and hem with silver thread in runic symbols. The lining of the robe was scarlet, and the man wore a wide gold collar around his neck.

“Children, this is Elder Thistlewhite. He is the man who will officiate at your pre-commitment ceremony. He is a Cimmerian priest, and he will be able to provide your family history, Harry.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you, children,” the booming voice of the priest echoed throughout the vast halls of the Manor. Squeaks from startled house-elves could be heard in the kitchen as they prepared the feast. “It is not often that I get to bear witness to the joining of two such powerful individuals. Please join me in the lounge; we have much to discuss.” With that, he turned and marched regally to the Malfoy lounge. The children rushed to catch up, and the adults followed at a more leisurely pace. Once everyone was seated comfortably, with Draco sitting on the floor between Harry’s feet, her hands carding through his golden locks, the man began to speak.

“Ms. Potter, do you have any recollection at all of your parents?” At the negative shake of her head, he continued. “Your mother was a Fury, an erinyes. She was Alecto, the Relentless.” Eyebrows flew into hairlines at this information. “Your father was a Daemon. They were not meant to meet or to reproduce. She saw James Potter when he was imbued with the Daemon spirit to protect your Dumbledore, and earned her title of the Relentless, as she relentlessly pursued him until he gave in. There were no.....guidelines, no precedents for what had occurred. The gods grew concerned at the union, and at the progeny that was produced.” Here he paused and looked with sadness at the girl. “They could not allow the union to stand, could not allow you to reach your full potential in their care, so they recalled your parents to the spirit realm. You were given to that animal by Dumbledore because he knew that it would break you and prevent you from coming to your full potential. Albus Dumbledore is an Afrit, and has been manipulating everything in the wizarding world to remove all obstacles in preventing the Djinn from dominating the human species. He tried, in his machinations, to keep you somehow

under his thumb. Through manipulations, he sought to control your friendships and your magical growth. In time, had he been able to succeed, he would have bonded with you to take your powers. Having them, he would have been the most powerful Djinn in existence, and an Immortal. With this bonding, you will complete a circle that will be unbreakable.

“Mr. Malfoy, you are a Guardian. As such, your powers will always match your mate’s. I understand that you are still children, but this bonding ceremony is very important in establishing the unbreakable connection between you. I understand that your magics have already bonded?” The children nodded and Draco sighed and relaxed against the seat of the chair, while Harry’s fingers continued to flutter through his hair, massaging his scalp. He wrapped a hand around her ankle, anchoring himself to her more firmly. These gestures weren’t lost on the priest, and he smiled. “That is indeed fortuitous. Tomorrow’s ceremony will establish the blood and soul bond. You must be very sure that this is what you want. Once it is done, it is irreversible.”

With that, everyone rose and went to eat. After everyone had found their place around the table, Harry looked at the priest.

“Severus,” she indicated the man with a nod in his direction, “had suggested that we reveal my gender and bonding status when we return to Hogwarts on Monday. However, after the information you’ve given us, I think it’ll be better if we keep it under wraps for a while. I don’t want to tip any advantage to Dumbledore, and I really want to stay under the radar for a while. Watch behind the scenes, see if I can damage the Headmaster’s reputation before we go in for the kill. Tell me about these Djinn. I need to know my enemies.”

“The Djinn have learned to assimilate themselves into the realm of earth, but they cannot remain for extended periods of time. They come in the form of wizards, witches, and practitioners of black magic who are capable of either serving or plaguing mankind. Dumbledore is considered a very powerful Djinn, and has been chosen to lead this revolution. Tell me, does he have any familiars?”

“Yes,” Draco answered. “He has a phoenix named Fawkes.”

"I would not be surprised to find that this phoenix is in fact an animagus. Djinn cannot have familiars in the strictest sense, as they are not true wizards or witches. However, they have lost souls who serve them in the hopes of achieving their greatest desires. These lost souls are rarely away from the Djinn, and take animagus "familiar" forms so that the Djinn may blend in to wizarding society. They are very dangerous, as the avarice of their hearts has wiped away any sense of right or wrong. Be warned, children. These lost souls cannot be saved, nor can they be converted. They can only be freed to face whatever punishments their sins have earned them. Do not be swayed by them, and do not feel sorry for them."

Information overload made Harry's eyes droop as the adults continued to discuss the situation at Hogwarts. When her head nearly fell into her pudding for the third time, Draco excused himself, picked her up, and carried her up the stairs to her bedchamber, adjoining his. He gently removed her robes and shoes, transfigured pjs for her, and covered her. He looked down at her pale face, framed by those luscious black locks, his eyes gleaming a soft silver. He bent down, kissed her forehead, and gently brushed her lips with his before he left her with a murmured goodnight.

Harry was gently kissed awake by Draco, having had her first nightmare-free sleep ever. She slowly came awake to lips on her forehead and cheek. When they grazed her lips, her eyes sprung open and she flinched. Draco immediately pulled back, his face blushing pink.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I just couldn't resist." She looked at the blonde, her eyes soft and muzzy, and smiled slowly.

"S'ok, Dray. I really liked it. I'm just a little nervous about affection still. Don't really know how to handle it."

"We're going very, very slowly. We're only eleven after all." There was laughter in his voice as he said it, and she giggled in return. "Your ceremonial robes are hanging on your bathroom door. There are oils and fragrances you must use when you bathe. My mother will be in here to help you put some of them on. You have about a half

hour to get ready, so hop to it!" She scowled fiercely at him, and he laughed all the way out the door.

Narcissa was very helpful and Harry was suitably prepared for the ceremony. They left her bedchamber and walked down the stairs. She was adorned in emerald green silk robes that changed hues as the light hit them. They were trimmed in silver, with runic embroidery on the back. Draco was similarly adorned; however his robes were silver shimmer, trimmed in emerald green. They stood across from each other over a ceremonial basin in the garden. The priest intoned some ancient Latin phrases, and the magic started to swirl around the group.

"Who willingly gives this boy for bonding?" the priest intoned.

"I, Lucius Malfoy, willingly give this boy for bonding." "Who willingly gives this girl for bonding?"

"I, Harry James Potter, willingly give myself for bonding."

The priest picked up an athame and some leather ties. He took the athame and ran the blade across both Draco's and Harry's wrists, then took the wrists and bound them together. As the blood from the children blended, the magic throbbed and hummed. The adults, wincing at the pressure building up, clapped their hands to their heads, groaning at the incredible vicelike power clutching at them. The children gazed into each other's eyes, silver on emerald, as the magic spun and danced between them. In a flash, it dove into their eyes, making them glow with an ethereal light. The glow faded, and they looked around at the other people, who were still recovering from the influx of magic. The adults looked at the children, and instead of children, they saw something almost godlike in their faces. There was power, and love, and peace in their countenances. The priest hurriedly untied their bound wrists and prepared to heal them. He saw that it was unnecessary. The wounds had closed, but there was left on the inside of each wrist a sigil. On Harry's wrist was a butterfly with runic symbols in the wings; on Draco's was a dragon with runic symbols in the wings.

“The bonding ceremony is complete. For all intents and purposes, you are now bonded mates. The sigils indicate magical hierarchy. The runes symbolize family history. You are now as one. Be joyous, be free, and be loved.”

Everyone slowly drifted back inside for the breakfast feast set out for after the ceremony. Lucius turned to the priest and invited him to stay.

"I cannot. My people are able to interact with the outside world only on a limited basis. My work here is finished, and I must get back. Should I spend too much time away from my world, I would be contaminated. Thank you for your gracious invitation, and please call on me again when the children are ready for the marriage."

The adults bowed respectfully to the priest and walked him to the front door. Then they walked back to the dining room, where the kids had already started to tuck in. They looked up and grinned sheepishly at being too impatient and hungry to wait for everyone else. No conversation was had as everyone else filled plates and started eating.

"There's just a couple of questions I have," Draco began as he started to feel full. "I know from my studies here at the Manor that Djinn are of the spirit world, and are by definition immortal. Why would Dumbledore need Harry's power to attain that which he already has?"

Lucius smiled proudly at his son. "That's a very good question." Draco flushed with pride at the praise. "Djinn have immortality as spirits. They can only maintain human form for short periods of time, and can only affect the living world minutely. What Dumbledore is after with Harry's power is to become humanoid and gain immortality in human form. Once he does this, he will be able to work through the corporeal world to achieve humanity for all Djinn. Once that happens, the evil will spread, and there will be no hope for wizard kind or mugglekind."

The people at the table took a moment to digest this information. Then Draco asked why their magic bonded in Charms. Snape spoke up here.

"Tell me what happened that day."

"Well," Harry spoke up for the first time. "We were learning Wingardium Leviosa and my wand started glowing sapphire blue. The

feather raised up very smoothly, and twirled gently as it hung in the air.

Weasel said something nasty about....”

“Wait,” Lucius interrupted. “You were harassed by a weasel?” Draco choked on the pumpkin juice he’d just swallowed, and Harry absently patted him on the back.

“No father,” he sputtered. “Ron Weasley.” Lucius looked at Harry with doubt.

“All I heard that day on the train was Weasel,” she shrugged. “Anyway, he was saying some nasty things about me only being able to use glass as my wand, and for some reason I got really furious. The wand turned black, and my feather went up in smoke....”

“Her wand cast fiendfyre at the feather. It took the shapes of some really ugly people,” the blonde shivered at the memory.

“Anyway, Draco grabbed my wand hand to calm me down, and Granger spoke up and explained my wand. By the way, I’d like a clearer explanation soon. The class got quiet, then Weasel reached around me to grab my wand. I felt such loathing radiating from him when he touched me. My wand flared crimson and knocked his arse out. Then it reached out to Draco, and we bonded magically. I hope Weasel’s not still in the Charms classroom.”

“It would serve him right, trying to grab something that didn’t belong to him,” the Slytherin huffed.

He’s lucky I didn’t get a hold of him, touching you like that....Harry’s eyebrows shot up into her hairline.

Did you just snarl about Weasel touching me? Draco blinked slowly and turned to face her.

Um, yes?



This is weird....Draco snorted loudly in reply, startling Snape and Lucius out of their conversation. They turned to the boy, identical eyebrow quirks, and the blonde reddened, dropping his silver eyes to his plate.

We can really do this, Harry thought at him, awe in her voice.

Yeah, now you can call for me when you need me. Heh, we can even talk during History of Magic. I wonder what else we can do? Suddenly, a flash of a very fat, very red face hovering over Draco, and pain in his groin alerted him that Harry was having a flashback. He quickly leaned toward her, whispering in her ear, trying to send her comfort through the bond. She flinched, her eyes tightly squeezed closed, then she reached for Draco's hand.

The block that our magical bonding placed in my mind is weakening. I feel some kind of external pressure, trying to force the memories out. Someone knows what happened to me, and is trying to force me to relive it.

Draco looked up at Severus. "Someone is trying to mess with Harry's mind. The block you found to lock away her memories is weakening. She says that she can feel some kind of outside pressure trying to force her to relive her past. How do we fix it?"

Severus thought for a few moments. "Perhaps you should try to use your will to strengthen hers. Maybe through the bond you share, you will help her shore up her barriers. Meanwhile, your father and I will research spells, amulets, or any other way to prevent this from happening again." With that, both men left the table. Harry's appetite was gone, and she was so shaken and depressed that she just retired to her room. Draco was frantic with worry, and he went with her to comfort her the best way he could.

She curled up on the bed, shaking with delayed fear and self-loathing. How could I let him do that to me? Touch me like that? RAPE me like that? Why didn't I stop him? Did I want it? Did I LIKE it? Did I DESERVE it? What could I POSSIBLY have done to deserve that? Am I a slut like lady pigman says? Will I ever have someone to love me? Can anyone ever love someone like me? Draco had heard every

thought through the bond, and he was in tears when he finally got to her room.

“No, Harry. None of it was your fault. You did nothing to deserve being treated like that. You are just a child. And you were little more than a baby when he started. You didn’t let that happen to you. It was done to you by someone who knew better. He was an adult abusing the trust and innocence of a child. You had no choice. You had no one to turn to. Dumbledore is responsible for putting you there. He’s responsible for destroying your ability to trust. He is responsible for the torture you suffer every day. I love you, Harry. I fell in love with you that day in the bookstore, when you so bravely trusted someone you barely knew. You made my heart swell with pride and you made me feel free. No one has ever trusted me the way you do. And no one will ever do to you again what that nasty piece of filth did. I won’t let them.”

Harry looked up into Draco’s tear-streaked face, and smiled gently at him. Her mood started to lighten as she listened to him. The love and compassion and strength flowing to her from him was breathtaking. She sent back as much of her love and faith as she could, and Draco grinned at her, wiping the last of the tears from his eyes.

“May I sit on the bed with you?” he asked. When she nodded and scooched back, he sat gently on the edge. He brushed away the tears with his fingertips, letting his feeling for her shine from his silver eyes. She closed her emerald ones and sighed. She was just starting to relax when another memory crashed through the barrier.

Pigman grunting as he thrust into her child’s body. A shrieking voice in the background. FREAK! WHORE! SLUT! DEMON SPAWN! NOT FIT TO LIVE! YOU DESERVE EVERYTHING HE DOES TO YOU! EVIL! SINFUL! BAD! BAD! BAD!

Harry shuddered, flinching at the words and the feelings. Draco “witnessed” everything, and in desperation climbed over her and curled up against her back. He wrapped his arms around her waist and began to whisper soothing, loving words of comfort in her ear. He tightened his arms when he felt her shudder again, and sent out himself along the bond, trying to block as much of the memory as he

could. The feelings and sensations started to fade, and Harry's body started to relax again. Draco stayed where he was, holding her and whispering to her, somehow knowing that the physical contact was the only way to prevent the mental blocks from shattering completely. He slowly shored her mental walls with his spirit and soul, and she slowly came back to herself.

After a short time, she turned to her other side to face the boy. He smiled hesitantly at her, sorrow and hope warring in his silver gaze. Her green eyes met his, a smile and peace in them. He relaxed again and smiled more widely still when she reached up and pressed a gentle kiss to his cheek. She placed her hand on his face, holding it, her thumb caressing his chin, occasionally brushing his lips.

Someday, she sent through the bond, still too shaken up to speak, I hope to be able to show you exactly what I feel for you. I hope to be able to put my past behind me and move on with you by my side. I want a family and a good life, and I know that you can give that to me. Just, please be patient with me.

We'll get there, he promised. I have faith in you. I have faith in us. I love you. By the way, when we finally reveal everything, what would you like your new name to be?

You choose.

Well, in our family, it's tradition to name the children after constellations.

Oooh, I like that. And I know just the name. Phoenix.

That's....brilliant, actually. Phoenix it is.

The children fell asleep looking at each other, so when Narcissa came to call them for lunch, she was a little taken aback at seeing them in the same bed together. Looks like we're going to have to have that little talk sooner than expected, she thought wryly. She cleared her throat loudly, and the kids jumped and flushed, looking ten kinds of guilty. They quickly leapt out of bed and shuffled their feet. They could not meet Narcissa's eye, so they mumbled

something about being really tired and fled the room. She laughed softly as she followed behind them.

They made it to the library, hoping that they wouldn't be in trouble. Severus and Lucius were still looking in some of the Malfoy family collections, trying to make some kind of sense of what had happened to Harry. They looked up when the kids entered the room, and were pleased to see the girl more relaxed. She smiled shyly at the two men, and stepped a little closer to Draco, twining her fingers with his. His eyebrows rose as he looked down at her, and she leaned her head on his shoulder. He looked back up at his father and godfather and smirked with pride. Severus' lips twitching and Lucius' eyebrow rising were the only acknowledgements of Draco's smugness.

Narcissa trailed into the library after the kids, and she exchanged a weighted look with the two men. Lucius nodded imperceptibly, and Snape glanced at the kids again, pondering their closeness.

"Draco, come with me," Lucius requested. The blonde looked at his father for a moment, then followed him out of the room. Narcissa bade Harry sit in one of the chairs. Severus, feeling out of place, excused himself and wandered off into the gardens. Narcissa cleared her throat and looked at the girl thoughtfully.

"Harry.....h-how much do you know about....hem.....the "birds and the bees"?" she asked. Harry's eyebrows went skyward as she looked at the Malfoy matriarch in shocked silence. Then she let loose with an uncontrollable belly laugh. She laughed herself silly, and Narcissa huffed in annoyance. Finally, after giggling in fits and starts, Harry got herself under control enough to answer.

"I was never actually given the sex talk, seeing as pigman started raping me when I was three. So I guess I'm pretty current in that birds and bees topic." This was said with a bluntness that bordered on cruelty. Mrs. Malfoy blanched and flinched at the harsh words.

"I'm sorry, dear. I didn't really think when I asked that. But you must know, what that despicable man did to you wasn't about sex. Sex between two mature loving people is a beautiful thing. It is the physical manifestation of the spiritual and emotional bond that the

couple already share. I know you and my son share that spiritual bond. I also know how much Draco really cares for you. I don't want the two of you to fall into the temptation of the physical side until you're both ready."

"I understand, Mrs. Malfoy. Believe me, I am so not ready for anything like that right now. I don't know if I'll ever be ready for that. But I know that Draco will wait, and he'll be patient with me as I sort out the mess that I am." Narcissa nodded, relieved. Meanwhile, in another room, Lucius was attempting to have the same embarrassing conversation with his son.

"So Draco, tell me of this.....thing between you and the girl." The Slytherin frowned at the cold manner in which Lucius referred to Harry.

"Well, father, I love her. And I've told her that I love her." Lucius frowned deeply, disturbed at how fast this relationship was moving.

"You are just children. How can you be sure that you truly feel this about her?"

"Father, did we not just go through a pre-commitment bonding ceremony? At your request, no less. If you were unsure of her suitability for me, why push for the bonding?"

Lucius scowled. Damn. "She is most suitable, for her power when she comes into it will be formidable, and that will only benefit the Malfoy family."

"Father," Draco growled threateningly for a twelve year old, "she is not a benefit for the family. She is someone who is important to me. She is someone I want to protect. Someone I want to be with. Someone I will devote my entire life to." Lucius nodded, secretly admiring the devotion he showed.

"Very well. I apologise for offending you. Have you been introduced to the concept of reproduction and sex?" Draco sputtered as he turned crimson in embarrassment.

“Y-yes, father. I’ve had the “talk” with Uncle Sev when I had that brief crush on Pansy. I know everything I need to. Please, don’t add anything else.” Lucius smirked and dismissed the blonde, who gratefully bolted from the room.

Can you believe that? My father was trying to talk to me about SEX!

That’s nothing. Your mother tried the same thing. I guess she got a little freaked when she caught us in bed together. I think I may have upset her a little. She kind of forgot what I went through with pigman and I wasn’t too pleasant when I reminded her. But she was really nice about it. Tried to explain to me that sex with love isn’t the same thing as what pigman did. Oh, here comes Severus. I think we need to get them to tell us more about my wand.

Good idea. I’ll be there in a couple. Where is your wand, I’ll get it.

It’s under my pillow.

Right. Be there shortly.

Harry made her way over to the French doors that led out into the garden. She looked out on the grounds without seeing, thoughts tumbling inward as she waited for the blonde to join them. The adults in the room felt the unease and distance emanating from the fragile-looking girl, but were at a loss as to how to fix it. Shortly, Draco returned to the library with the mahogany box. Harry turned from her contemplation of her thoughts, and took the box, grabbing the boy’s hand at the same time. They walked together to the couch in front of the fire, and Harry handed the box to Severus. He opened it, and gasped in astonishment at what the box revealed.

“What is it, Severus?” Lucius asked curiously. Snape was too stunned to answer for a moment, and Malfoy looked over the man’s shoulder to get a better look at the wand. His jaw fell open in shock and he looked at his wife with wide, surprised grey eyes. She strode forward and looked into the box as well.

“Oh my, how beautiful,” she gasped quietly. Snape slowly became aware of his surroundings again and looked at Lucius over his shoulder.

“Is that what I think it is?” Lucius murmured.

“It is.”

“A Karstjewel. Where did you get this, child?” Lucius’ gaze snapped to the girl on the couch.

“Mr. Ollivander gave it to me,” she replied.

“How much did he charge for it?”

“Oh, he didn’t charge me anything. Like I said, he gave it to me. Mumbled something about it going to its rightful owner and then wandered back into the back of his shop. It was really weird.”

“Well,” Severus barked. “It seems you are the proud owner of a Karstjewel wand. This is one of the most powerful wands ever made. It is extremely rare...”

“We already know this from that Granger girl,” Harry huffed impatiently. Severus scowled darkly at the girl for the interruption, and she had the grace to blush in embarrassment. “I’m sorry, Severus,” she murmured.

“To continue. This is not a man-made wand. This crystal is formed from thousands of years of pressure in rock. It only forms under certain conditions, and in special climates. The crystalline form manifests itself only under the most narrow of chemical reactions and environmental pressures. The hair down the center is of unknown origin. It is the root of the magic contained in the wand. The being to which this hair belonged no longer exists; however, the power inherent in the being is felt in the wand. Once a Karstjewel wand is found, a master wandmaker gets in touch with the magic, and that is what guides his hand to carve the scroll work, filigree, and runic symbols on the barrel of the wand. The runic symbols themselves are the most important, for they connect the true wielder to the wand and

its magic. The runic symbols tell the story of the wielder. Your story, Harry. I will copy the runic symbols on the barrel of the wand, and do some research. It is my hope that I may discover what your story is. When I am successful, I will inform you."

"Thank you, Severus," the girl replied, a little stunned at the revelation.

"There is one more thing," he continued. "As the wand has created the magic bond between you and young Malfoy, there is something of him in the story on the wand, as well. Lucius, I will be in touch when I have more information. Good day." And with that, Severus bowed and exited the room, wand in hand, to make sketches of the symbols. Lucius looked at his son, speechless. Harry and Draco were a bit flummoxed, as well.

"This just gets curiouser and curiouser," Narcissa quipped.



"Harry, where's your snake?" Draco asked. The raven-haired girl opened her mouth to answer when a shriek echoed throughout the Manor.

"There she is," Harry replied nonchalantly.

"Well," the blonde quipped, "we'd better go rescue her before she becomes someone's lunch. Snake is a delicacy in a lot of high wizarding society." Harry's eyes widened comically in fright for her precious Dragon before she fled the bedroom. Draco chuckled to himself, loving how well he could get under her skin. He sauntered slowly after her, and heard a knock on the front door as he reached the upstairs hallway. When the house elf answered the door, Draco saw someone there that he never expected. He waited in the hallway, eavesdropping as the house elf allowed the man into the entryway and went to fetch Lucius.

Lucius came to the entryway to greet the visitor.

"Hello, Lupin. To what do I owe the pleasure?" Lucius queried.

"I'm here about your son's friendship with Harry Potter," Lupin stated. Upstairs, Draco frowned and quietly stepped nearer the voices so he could hear better.

"What of it?"

"Well, we've gotten some disturbing information that might damage your reputation, as well as that of your son's, should it get out. We are really encouraging you to step in and put an end to this relationship before it damages you permanently." The steely threat in his voice was painfully obvious.

"Perhaps you could tell me of what you've learned, and allow me to make an informed decision."

"We have information that indicates that Harry Potter suffers from delusions and a severe paranoid psychosis. He is horribly unstable and prone to telling outrageous lies to gain sympathy and attention. He has no control over his magic, and is a physical threat. His mental

diseases stem from the syphilis his muggle mother had while she was pregnant with him, which she passed to him through the birth canal. His father was sent to Azkaban for prostituting his muggle wife. Harry Potter isn't James Potter's natural son; he is a product of one of her johns. As you can see, his diseases as well as his family history will do irreparable harm to your family, and he poses a very real physical threat to your son. If you're smart, you'll sever the friendship between the children. Soon." And with that, Lupin left.

By the time Lupin was finished, Draco had his wand out and was ready to storm down the stairs and curse the wolf. He ran down the stairs, fighting valiantly against the rage that was threatening to boil over. He looked at his father, his silver orbs flashing and sparking with uncontrolled fury. His father's calm silver eyes looked back, and Lucius smirked.

"Draco, call Harry. Have her meet us in the library." Lucius turned and left, and Draco spent many minutes marshalling his temper before he spoke to her.

Harry, father wants us to meet him in the library.

Draco, what's wrong? Your voice sounds funny.

It's ok, love. I'll explain shortly. By the way, did you find Dragon?

Yes, she was terrifying some of the house elves. Apparently, they thought she was looking at them as a snack. I tried to tell them that she wasn't hungry, just curious, but I don't think they believed me.

'S OK. They'll be fine. See ya in a couple.

OK.

He walked to the library and waited for Harry there. Lucius was sitting behind his desk, looking at some parchment. Finally, Harry entered the room, her snake draped gracefully around her shoulders. Lucius looked up from his paperwork, and smiled at the lovely snake.

"That's a beautiful serpent, Harry. What's its name?"

“Her name is Dragon, because she’s golden and beautiful like Draco.” Harry blushed a bit.

Lucius sighed, not looking forward to what he had to say.

“Sit down Harry, Draco. There are some things I need to discuss with you.” The children sat in the chairs facing the desk and waited. Lucius hesitated for only a moment before he began to speak.

“I have paperwork here from Gringotts. When your bond became official, all accounts in your name came under the Malfoy stewardship. We cannot access the vaults, but we are able to control information. According to the paperwork, you have three vaults, filled to the rafters. You are almost as wealthy as we. I am in the process of placing the Malfoy name on your vaults; however, I can only do that if you sign the paperwork in blood, authenticating your signature. I know it’s a lot, asking you to trust us on such short notice, but.....”

“It’s fine, sir. Just tell me where I need to sign. I trust Draco, and I trust you.” With that simple declarative statement, Harry showed her true worth. She signed the documents, making her addition to the Malfoy family more permanent and more solid.

“One other thing. We received a visitor today. One of Dumbledore’s Order of the Phoenix members came over here to disseminate false information about you and your past so that I would chase you away from my son. Dumbledore is attempting to cast aspersions on your character. I must warn you that it will get quite a bit uglier.”

“I understand ,sir. I’ve been thinking. Maybe we should start erasing Harry Potter from the public memory. The signature scar is gone from my forehead. Draco and I have already decided on a new name for me, for when I “morph” and, since Dumbledore is stepping up his efforts to isolate me, maybe it’s time to “kill” Harry Potter. If we could somehow lengthen my hair before tomorrow, I think we could really start effectively killing the legend. If we orchestrate enough doubt as to the existence of Harry Potter, maybe we can also create enough doubt that this Lord Voldewhoosis exists as well. We could actually start taking the Djinn down.”

“Excellent notion. I believe Severus keeps hair-growing potion on hand for when some of his potions students have “accidents” that alter their looks. I’ll get him here shortly with some potion, and meanwhile, Narcissa can take you shopping for more appropriate clothing. Not that you don’t look fetching in baggy jeans and that horrid muggle shirt,” the last was said with biting sarcasm as Lucius curled his lip in disgust. Harry blushed and looked down at her flannel.

I like my flannels. They’re comfortable to slouch around in.

You can keep a couple of them. Just use them as nightshirts.

All right. If this is what you want.....

I’d love to see you in more girly clothes. Can’t wait to see you with long hair, either.....

Harry sighed. All these changes, almost all at once. She was feeling a little overwhelmed and nervous. And she still wasn’t sure she wanted everyone to know she was a girl. Draco felt her nerves and reached for her hand, gently rubbing the back of it with his thumb.

“I know we talked about not revealing the truth too soon. I’d still like to accomplish that. I think what we can do is force Dumbledore to lie about Potter’s whereabouts. Keep him alive, just not in the school anymore. We will have to keep an eye on you....by the way, what is your new name? We might as well start calling you that,” Lucius stated.

“Draco and I decided to follow your family’s tradition of naming children after constellations, and I chose the constellation Phoenix.”

“Excellent choice,” the elder blonde gloated. “It will be such a slap in the face to Dumbledore, using his own “familiar” name. Oh, I think this is going to be fun.”

The children grinned at Malfoy’s enthusiasm, and Narcissa glided into the room at that moment.

“Narcissa, darling, you’re to take Phoenix to Paris to purchase clothing suitable for a Malfoy daughter-in-law. Money is no object. She must be stunning.” The Malfoy matriarch’s eyebrows rose gently as she looked at Phoenix. The girl looked back, and saw approval and fondness in the ice-blue eyes. She nodded at the girl and beckoned. Together, they swept from the room and went to get cloaks for the trip. Narcissa ensured that Phoenix’s cloak hid her horrific clothing as she didn’t want anyone to judge the girl too harshly. They apparated to Paris, the girl’s head swimming uncomfortably.

They spent several hours browsing the boutiques and couture shops, finding exactly what would befit a Malfoy daughter. Narcissa’s heart was filled with joy at finally having a girl to shop for. She hoped to cultivate a strong, motherly relationship with the girl, since Phoenix really needed that closeness of strong family. She also hoped that the girl would trust Lucius enough to look on him as a father. Narcissa realized that this would all come with time, and they had plenty of that. She smiled down at the child, letting her feelings for the girl break free from the Malfoy Mask. Phoenix responded with a glowing smile and took Narcissa’s hand, elation making her hop a little as they walked.

“Phoenix, I hope you will be able to one day consider Lucius and myself as your parents. We care for you very much, and would love to be able to provide you with the family support you’ve never had. For us, family is the most important thing in the world. And anyone who is family is afforded the same protections and privileges. We consider you family, and hope that you can do the same.”

Phoenix thought carefully about her answer. “Mrs. Malfoy, I would be honored to be considered part of your family. I understand that the bonding has made me part of the family physically, but I would like you to know that I really feel like part of the family. Thank you for taking me in, for allowing me to be close to you, for showing me what true family is. You’re right. I’ve never had a real family, and I am overjoyed and overwhelmed that I finally get to have that. Thank you.” Phoenix looked up into the blue eyes and wrapped her arms around the woman’s waist in a tight hug. Narcissa froze for a fraction, then leant down and wrapped the small child in her own arms, tears coursing down her face. In this position, they apparated back to the

Manor. Lucius was in the foyer when the girls appeared, and his eyes widened in surprise at seeing them wrapped in an embrace. His heart swelled with joy and pride. She's accepting us. She's becoming a real part of the family. I finally have a daughter.

The floor in the library sounded and Severus stepped into the foyer to behold the sight of a true family unit. He felt the compassion and love flowing around the room. He watched the woman and child embrace tightly for a moment, glad that he was able to witness the beginning of healing for this fragile child.

"Harry, I have brought the potion to lengthen your hair," he finally spoke up.

"Thank you Severus. And the name is Phoenix." Snape's eyebrows flew into his hairline and he chuckled loud and long. Of course, he thought. What an excellent way to tell Dumbledore that she's free. She strode toward him and took the potion he held out. She drank it down, again without grimacing at the atrocious taste, and a few moments later, a cascade of ebony locks fell to her waist. Her hair curled and twisted softly around her face, and swung gently when she moved her head.

"Urgh, I never realized how heavy hair really was," she quipped irritably. Draco had entered the hall at the voices, and his eyes widened and glazed over at the sight of the newly resurrected Phoenix. His breath caught in his throat and he stared for long moments at the child. She blushed and looked down. He immediately stepped forward and grabbed her chin, lifting her face to his. Emeralds looked into mercury and he whispered, "You're beautiful." And she was. He carded his fingers through the locks around her face, smiling gently at her. She smiled back, her heart swelling with love. This is love, she thought. This is real. Draco grinned widely at her and her brows furrowed. Then she blushed in embarrassment, unaware that she had been broadcasting and he 'heard' what she thought. She turned from him and grabbed some of the parcels from Narcissa's hands and bolted up the stairs. She didn't come down until dinnertime, and she had dressed appropriately for it in an emerald green silk jersey shin-length dress with gigot sleeves, black tights and black patent-leather flats. The flats had bows on the toes, embedded

with Swarovski crystals. Her hair was pulled back in a loose tail, held in place with a jeweled butterfly clip, the wings in constant motion with every movement. Lucius smiled proudly at her and Draco's mouth hung open.

"Don't drool, Draco. It's unbecoming a Malfoy," Narcissa quipped. Draco's mouth snapped shut with an audible click. Severus, who had joined the family for dinner, genuinely smiled fondly at the girl and nodded his approval. Phoenix blushed, smiled and sat next to Draco. He couldn't take his eyes off of her, and uncomfortable feelings swirled in his stomach. She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. He smiled goofily and turned his head back to the table as the food appeared.

"Phoenix, I think we need to start teaching you etiquette and comportment befitting a lady," Narcissa began. "I understand that you weren't raised in the best of ways, and I also understand that you lack any formal education. May I ask, how did you learn to read?" Phoenix looked at her for a moment, deep in thought, before she answered.

"When pigman and lady pigman weren't home, I would watch the television. I would pay particular attention to programs that educated children. They helped me learn to read as well as speak. My cousin had children's books that he never looked at, so I would sneak them into my room and practice reading. As I got older, I worked out how to read harder books, and when I mispronounced a word I had learned in one of the books, lady pigman would correct me with a slap to the face. I learned very quickly how to sound out the words and speak properly. Most of my vocabulary was hard-won and lessons well learned." The people at the table flinched a little at her hard tone, and she felt sympathy and compassion radiating from her intended. The one thing she never felt from him was pity.

Why don't you feel sorry for me? she asked, looking into his mercury-colored eyes.

There's nothing to feel sorry for. You are a fine, strong, beautiful girl who's had a really rough life. I feel very bad for the things you've had to suffer, and I wish more than anything that I could take all your pain away. But I can't feel sorry for you. You are too strong and brave to

feel sorry for. I'm in awe of you for surviving that hell and being able to still trust. Especially total strangers like my friends and I were. How did you do that? WHY did you do that?

I'll explain later, if you like.

Draco nodded and Phoenix turned back to Narcissa, who had paused in her discussion at the sudden lack of attention. The girl blushed, apologized, and looked at the woman expectantly.

"I think we should bring you back here every weekend for charm, etiquette, dialect, manners, and anything else that you need schooling in. We also need to test the extent of your general knowledge in areas of history, English, math, science, geography, and anything else we feel your lack of education has left you deficit in. Lucius will start your magic and wand training as well. Where you are missing educationally, we will provide tutors to bring you up to speed. We understand that you've lived in the muggle world for the first eleven years of your life, but have not been exposed to much of it. What has happened in the muggle world does affect the wizarding world as well, and you should be thoroughly cognizant of events in the muggle world that reflect in the wizarding world. We want you to be a fitting representative of the Malfoy family, and we want you to show the family's strength. A well-educated Malfoy is a strong, effective, commanding Malfoy. Never forget that."

After dinner, where everyone had an opinion on the state of affairs with Dumbledore, the kids ascended the stairs to their rooms. They were both tired, and knew they'd be returning to Hogwarts in the morning, so they felt they needed to get to bed early. Once at Phoenix's room, Draco asked if he could come in. She opened the door wider, and he walked in before her. She shut the door quietly behind them.

"OK, explain," he stated baldly.

"You....were the first person I've ever seen that was my own age," she began hesitantly. "My cousin doesn't count. He's not a person, just pigman junior. You were angelic and golden and beautiful, and I felt something...tug at me, telling me that you were someone I could



trust. I couldn't take my eyes off of you. When you came at me, I thought oh god, he's just like pigman. When you stopped, I saw something in your eyes...something safe. I didn't see want, I saw friendship and trust and safety. When you told me that you'd make sure I was safe, I felt such overwhelming relief. Like I had found a place to hide. You have no idea how much I needed a place to hide.

"Then, in the bookstore, when all those people came at me, you were there, with your friends. You had made a wall between me and the world, and the gratitude just swelled in me. My very first friends. People who put themselves in harm's way for me. And when I told you some of my story, you didn't flinch away from me. You didn't call me ugly names. You didn't make me feel like I was diseased. You made me feel even safer, if that was possible. I started falling in love with you at that very moment. Only I didn't know what it was. You made me feel so warm and fuzzy inside. Then your parents show me compassion and kindness without strings, and I never knew I could be so happy. I have a real family for the first time in my life and I love it." Tears had started coursing down her cheeks as she spoke, and Draco walked across to her and pulled her into his arms, holding her tightly to him. He murmured nonsense words of love in her ear and she sobbed her happiness all over his shoulder.

After a time, they parted, and Draco went to his rooms so he could pack and sleep. Phoenix stared at all the clothes she had, the new robes, the shoes and accessories, and marveled at the complete one-eighty her life had taken in such a short time. She was considering how to pack all these things when there was a gentle tap on her door. She opened the door to see Draco's parents standing at the door, smiling.

"We've come to wish you good night, Phoenix. And to tell you how happy we are to see you finally relax." The girl grinned, and impulsively reached out to hug Lucius. He started for a moment, then gently placed his hands on her back and patted it gently. She looked up at him, then reached up on her tippy toes. He leaned down and she gently kissed his cheek. She did the same to Narcissa, before saying goodnight and closing the door. The Malfoys stood at the closed door, stunned and grinning at each other, before walking along the corridor to their son's room. He opened the door at their

knock, and did the same thing. The parents sauntered to their own quarters, feeling blessed and lucky at the trust their children had bestowed upon them.

Monday dawned bright and new, and the children had been sitting at the dining table, drowsily wading through breakfast when Lucius came from his library.

“Phoenix, I found something in the Malfoy safe in the cellars. It appears to be some sort of amulet with mind protection spells on it. I found reference of it in one of the Malfoy diaries, and I thought that maybe you could wear it to keep Dumbledore at bay. It came with a companion piece for your intended. Apparently, there were some soul mate bonds in the Malfoy histories that required this form of protection. Yours will be this pendant,” here he held up a filigree dragon with ruby eyes on a fine silver chain. “Draco, yours is this signet ring.” Lucius held out the silver ring with onyx stone. A silver dragon was carved into the stone of the ring. The children could feel the power radiating from the jewelry, and Draco stepped forward to take the pendant, while Phoenix took the ring. The blonde gently placed the pendant around the girl’s neck, and she swept her hair aside so he could fasten it. She let go of her hair, and he stroked his fingers through it for a few moments. Then she turned and took his right hand, sliding the ring on his middle finger. It magically resized itself to fit perfectly. Instantly, they felt almost like a protective bubble was surrounding them. They felt...insulated from the world. They grinned at each other, their feelings for each other deepening with every moment they spent together. Phoenix’s soul, once dark and ashy, flared to life with renewed hope and joy, rising flame-like from the ashes of her pain. She felt renewed in Draco’s faith and love, and Harry Potter was no more.

The children were herded to the apparition site outside the Manor’s wards, where they were Side-Along apparated by Snape back to Hogwarts. Their luggage had already been sent ahead by the house elves, so all they had to do was go to their common room and get ready for class. They left Severus in the front hall and hurried to the Slytherin common room, no one in the halls to impede their progress. They quickly got dressed, and Phoenix pulled her hair back into a thick horsetail at the back of her head, tying a hank of emerald yarn

around it. She also put a couple of small jeweled barrettes in it to hold some of the flyaways down. Her bangs framed her lovely oval face and emerald eyes, and she looked stunning. She stepped from her room just as Draco made it to the bottom of the stairs. He gaped at her, and she blushed. They took hands and walked out the door to join the rest of the school in their busy day.

Potions class was...different. Everyone was stunned to see the beautiful girl sitting with Malfoy, and were horribly confused at the marked absence of Harry Potter. Since Draco and Phoenix had skipped breakfast in the Great Hall, Dumbledore was unaware of the change. Rumors started flying around the school about the death of Harry Potter. Everyone questioned his sudden disappearance, and started to cast suspicious glances at the Slytherins. Suddenly, Weasel stood up in the middle of Snape's discussion of, ironically, the hair-growing potion and pointed his finger at Draco.

"What have you done with Harry Potter?" he demanded hotly. His face started going puce in his fear and rage. Draco looked blankly at Weasel for a moment, then smirked at the boy.

"I've done nothing to the Boy Who Lived. Why don't you ask Dumbledore where he is? I'm sure he'll be able to tell you."

"The last time we saw Potter was when the two of you left with Snape on Friday. Now he's gone, and you're here. Where is he?"

"I can honestly tell you that I don't know. Now leave me alone." Weasel approached the table that Draco and Phoenix were sitting at and stuck his finger in Draco's face. Instantly, the girl's emerald eyes darkened with rage and she looked at the red-head, power simmering and seething around her. For his part, Weasel's eyes widened as he recognized the feeling surrounding him. His mouth fell open as he looked at the girl. Then he spun and looked at the Potions Professor, his mouth still hanging open. Snape looked back at him blankly, his obsidian eyes sparking with amusement. Weasel mumbled something and went back to his seat, his face still red, but from embarrassment now. Granger, who was seated next to him, started whispering to him, but he just shook his head, his eyes staring at his

desk. Snape continued his lecture, assigned homework, and dismissed the class.

“Mr. Malfoy, Ms. Evans, please stay for a few moments. I must speak with you.” The rest of the class filtered out, many students walking up to Weasel to ask him what happened. He only shook his head again and ran from the room.

“Well, Phoenix, it seems you’ve made quite an impression your first day. Care to tell me what happened?”

“I don’t know, Severus. I felt my magic flare again, and it felt like it came in contact with his mind somehow. I felt some of my memories fly out at him, and he backed down. Maybe I scared him.”

“More likely your memories scared him,” Draco drawled. “Apparently, these protections we wear can also reverse effects as well. I wonder how long it will be before Dumbledore knows Harry Potter no longer exists. By the way, Uncle Sev, why Evans?”

“It was the first name I could come up with; it was a girl I had a crush on when I went to Hogwarts. Phoenix even has her green eyes. I’m sure Dumbledore will want to “sort” you, since you are a “new” student. I don’t expect that you’ll be placed anywhere but Slytherin. I expect that Dumbledore will contact me soon about you. I must prepare. I will come later and let you know what’s going on.”

The children left the dungeons and went to Charms next. Weasel wasn’t in class, and didn’t show up for any of the other classes he had with the pair. He was conspicuously absent at lunch and dinner as well. Dumbledore didn’t make lunch, but was there at dinner. He eyed the girl speculatively, tapping his fingers on the tabletop. Then he stood and announced a “sort” for the “new student.” He had McGonagall bring out the stool and the hat, and called up Phoenix Evans for sorting. Phoenix stood, and walked up to the stool. She put the hat on without sitting, and the voice spoke in her head again.

Ms. Potter, I am surprised to speak to you again.

I know. I don't want to change houses. I've just decided to 'come out' as it were.

Ah. And what are we calling you, now?

My name is Phoenix Evans.

Lovely name. It suits you, as a phoenix rising from the ashes of your horrific life. Good luck, little one.

"Slytherin!" the hat shouted. Again, everyone at the Slytherin table cheered. Most of them knew who she really was, because they were already good friends with her, and were protecting her. She went to sit down next to her intended again, and in front of everyone, kissed him on the cheek. He blushed mightily, and Dumbledore glared, realizing that he was swiftly losing his chance to own that incredible power. He seethed, and Severus glanced at the angry man, smirking in triumph.

A/N: Thank you for the support and reviews. I...don't take compliments well as I very rarely get them and don't really know how to respond except to say thank you. I get all warm and fuzzy inside when I see all the author and story alerts. Thank you again.....I'm glad I could please you all.

---

---

"Severus, my boy, I need to speak to you. Now."

Fuck, Snape grumbled to himself. Aloud he admitted the headmaster into his chambers. He gestured to the seating by the fireplace, and Dumbledore sat on the sofa facing the flames. Severus sat in the armchair to the left and looked expectantly at the old man.

"I do not appreciate that Ms. Potter has decided to reveal her gender. I am sure that Mr. Malfoy has had some undue influence on her and has convinced her to do this. I fear it is to keep his reputation, and that of his family, intact. Some information came to light about Potter, and I feel that young Mr. Malfoy believes that if he were to erase Mr. Potter, than the problems will not exist. Unfortunately, that is not true," the headmaster sighed. Severus already knew about the conversation with Lupin, and fury started to build in the Potions Master.

"She is a very unstable and dangerous, diseased girl, and we cannot have her destroy one of the oldest pureblood families left. You must keep an eye on her, Severus, and report to me any behaviors that would put young Malfoy in danger. I will try to control the damage that the apparent disappearance of the Savior of the Wizarding World has caused. I cannot pull her out of classes, so I need you to be my eyes and ears. I will brook no refusal, and punishment will be severe should my orders not be followed. Are we clear?"

Severus marshaled his rage and nodded once. The headmaster rose and strode to the door. He turned and cast a silent Crucio on Severus, and the man fell to the floor, screaming. Then the Headmaster turned and left. Snape panted on the floor for a moment, his muscles twitching as he tried to come to grips with the insanity that was

Dumbledore. I've got to warn Phoenix and Draco. He's out for blood now. After a few moments, he rose shakily from the floor, pulled his robes around him, and slowly left his rooms, heading for the Slytherin common room. He spoke the password and entered the room.

Phoenix and Draco were together on the couch in front of the fire, cradling Dragon as they fussed over her. They looked up at Severus as he entered.

"Uncle Sev, what happened?" Draco rose and went to his godfather, looking at the pale, drawn face.

"Dumbledore visited me just now. He is not pleased with the situation, and has asked me to spy on you for him. He wants me to protect the Malfoy heir and the reputation of...how did he put it...oh yes, one of the oldest pureblood families left. He repeated the information Lupin had told your father yesterday." Draco flushed in anger, remembering the nasty words that had come from the wolf's mouth. "Phoenix, I fear that the headmaster will not make your experience here easy. I advise both you and Draco to keep on your toes; he will try to separate the both of you. I will try to invent things so as to avoid being Crucio'd too much. I must go." With that cryptic statement, Snape left the common room.

Phoenix looked at Draco, curiosity and concern warring in her features. Draco sat down heavily next to her, deep in thought. She took his hand and waited patiently for him to speak. When he did, her eyes got huge, and she started to tremble.

"Crucio is an unforgivable curse. When used, it causes excruciating pain all over the body. The body spasms and twitches as muscles react to the pain running through it. If it lasts more than a few seconds, nerve and muscle damage can occur. After a few minutes, insanity can set in because the pain is so intense that the mind shuts down. If used too many times on one person, he will develop a residual buildup of the curse, which takes its toll later in that person's life. The other two unforgivable curses are Avada Kedavra, which is the Killing Curse, and Imperio, which allows the caster to control the mind of the castee. Father has suspected for a long time that Dumbledore has been using the Imperio to control the Ministry of

Magic. Using the unforgivable to control the information being released. I need to owl Father about Severus' meeting. Want to come with me?"

Phoenix nodded, and they got up from the couch, the girl draping Dragon around her slim shoulders. They left the dungeons and climbed the stairs. Coming around the bend in front of the Great Hall, they ran into Hermione Granger. The girl looked at them appraisingly, keeping her distance from the large snake. Draco's eyebrows raised at the girl, and he smirked, waiting for....something.

"What do you want, Granger?" the blonde finally asked, as the bushy-haired girl made no move to get out of the couple's way. Granger only raised her eyebrow in response and continued to look at the girl beside him.

"Dumbledore sent a formal announcement to the heads of house, stating that Harry Potter was sent to a private training academy somewhere in the Americas; he felt that Harry would benefit from some of the military and tactical magical training being offered there. He's supposed to come back in three years. I don't believe it. Your magic," and here Granger indicated Phoenix, "feels the same as his. You look like him. You even sound like him. I think you're Harry Potter. And I want to know what's going on."

Do you think we can trust her? Draco asked.

I don't know. I don't know her, and I get no real vibes from her.

Well, she seems really scarily smart, and she's pretty much figured you out. If we can get her to understand about Dumbledore, she might actually be an asset.

I don't want to trust anyone else, Draco. I CAN'T trust anyone else.

I know, Phoenix. I know. I'll carry the burden for this. You don't have to do or say anything. I'll give her a chance, see what she's willing to do, what she's willing to HEAR before we trust her with everything. Phoenix nodded and stepped back a pace. Granger saw this, and frowned.



“Granger, you’ll deal with me. I am willing to give you a chance. Phoenix will observe, but you will not talk directly to her. You will not approach her or invade her personal space in any way. Is that understood?”

Granger frowned for a few moments, still looking at the ebony-haired girl. Then she nodded.

“Meet me in the library tomorrow after dinner. We have a lot to discuss.” With that, Granger turned away and went up to her common room. Draco and Phoenix looked at each other for a moment, sharing their conflicting emotions, then walked up to the owlery. While Draco composed his letter, Phoenix looked at all of the owls. Most of them were pretty nondescript brown barn owls, but one stood out. It was snow white, with black markings on the wings. It was by far the largest owl there. Phoenix stared at it for a few moments, stunned at its beauty, when it launched itself from its perch and flew directly to her. She stepped back, startled, flinging an arm up to protect her face from the owl’s talons. But the owl just settled on the raised arm, gently wrapping its claws around the thin arm. The girl slowly lowered her arm and looked into the large golden eyes of the owl. Suddenly, a strong magical vibe coursed through her, and her emerald eyes widened as she looked at the beautiful creature perched on her arm. Draco looked up and gasped at the sight of the owl on the girl’s arm. He stepped forward slowly, not wanting to startle the bird into hurting the girl.

“Her name is Hedwig,” Phoenix bubbled to him. “And she’s supposed to be my owl. She was....sent.....for me. I don’t know by whom, but she’s mine. She’s been waiting for me. For me!” She looked at the boy, joy and excitement shining in her green eyes. The smile that graced her face was huge and radiated such happiness that Draco was stunned into silence. He handed the letter to Hedwig and asked her to take it to Malfoy Manor. The owl took the letter, looked at Phoenix again, and launched herself gracefully into the air. The children watched as the owl flew away, powerful wings pounding at the air.

The following day, classes went on as usual. Those who didn't hear their heads of house announce Potter's whereabouts were filled in by their housemates. Rumors abounded: from Potter being killed by Slytherins to Potter going insane and slaughtering a bunch of people and ending up in St. Mungo's psych ward. The misinformation about Potter's history had somehow been leaked out, and Dumbledore had his hands full trying to put out the small fires this had caused. Since he was working so hard to refute the misinformation, he could no longer use it as a weapon to separate Phoenix from Draco. They chortled all the way through all their classes, glad that Draco's letter to Lucius had, in fact, worked some magic. Weasel was still conspicuously absent from classes, and some of his housemates started looking at the emerald-eyed child as the cause of Weasel's absence. They had begun to put two and two together and figured that she had cast some kind of curse at him. They conveniently forgot that she was just learning her magic, as were they, and they spent many class periods grumbling and glaring at the girl. For her part, she barely noticed them.

The gang entered the Great Hall for dinner, and a hush fell over the hall. Every single eye was trained on the group as they made their way to their spot at the Slytherin table. As the group sat, an object came sailing from somewhere in the room and hit Phoenix full in the face. She cried out, and a barrage of objects from the entire hall started hailing down on the girl and her friends. Dumbledore was suspiciously absent, attempting to deal with the problems Potter's disappearance had caused. Professor Snape quickly cast a shielding charm around the group as the deputy headmistress cast Sonorous and bellowed.

"ENOUGH! You will cease this horrid display at once! Every single student in this hall will stay when dinner is completed and scrub it from top to bottom, using no magic. Ms. Evans, since you and your friends seem to be the targets of this assault, I leave it to you to decide further punishment for the other students." Phoenix ducked her head, her face red and tears streaming.

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall, but I don't want them punished any more. I think cleaning the mess will be enough." The other Slytherins nodded in understanding and agreement. Taking the

higher road may not have been strictly Slytherin, however, it sure as hell felt good. They all turned and walked out of the hall. Once outside the now closed doors, Phoenix collapsed to the floor, sobs shaking her small frame. Draco bent down and curled himself over her, holding her and comforting her as much as he could. He rocked her back and forth for a time, until her sobs faded away. He then helped her up from the floor, and they slowly made their way to the library, splitting off from the other Slytherins. Once in the library, they found a table in the very back corner of the room and sat to wait for Granger.

Unfortunately, Granger was stuck with the few other students who didn't participate in the throwing, and she had to help clean the hall. It was almost midnight when she finally showed up in the Library. Phoenix had leaned back in her chair to close her eyes for a moment, but had fallen asleep. Draco gently slid her from the chair and leaned himself against the wall, placing the girl's head in his lap. He was stroking her ebony curls when Granger finally made her appearance. She looked at the pair for a moment, then approached the table and sat. Draco gently shook the girl's shoulder, waking her up. She sat up and rubbed at bleary green eyes before spying Granger at the table. Phoenix's eyes narrowed in suspicion and fear, and Draco pulled a chair away from the table, setting it in the corner, facing the Library. He helped the child off the floor, and guided her to the chair. He took a chair at the table, making sure he didn't block Phoenix's view of the table, Granger, or the library.

"What's going on?" the bushy-haired girl asked. Draco raised an eyebrow and looked at the girl for a moment.

"Dumbledore's been lying to everyone. The Harry Potter of legend doesn't exist. He is actually she," indicating Phoenix in the corner, who flinched at the attention, "and she has never met Lord Voldemort. The scar she had was caused by an accident with a toy her cousin was playing with when she was five. Her mother was Alecto, the Relentless and her father was a Daemon created to protect Dumbledore. When they got together and crafted this beautiful creature, the gods felt that her potential couldn't be developed with her parents so they were called back to the spirit world. Dumbledore knew of her and knew of her potential, so he placed her with muggles,

to keep her obedient and submissive. He wants her power. We can't let him have her."

Granger listened to this without comment. Her eyes widened when she found out that the girl's mother was a Fury, and glanced at the girl in the corner. Phoenix's eyes narrowed, and the green darkened, as if perceiving a threat. Granger quickly looked away, and thought about the rest of Draco's story. She couldn't believe.....didn't want to believe that the benevolent headmaster was doing this. Had done this. She opened her mouth to argue, but then glanced back at the girl in the corner. Phoenix's body language told of mistrust and pain. She held herself tightly, her arms wrapped around herself, her legs crossed. She sat partially turned away from the table, facing toward Draco. Her eyes were closed, and shadows flickered across her face. Shadows of fear and trepidation. Granger eyed the girl for a moment longer, then looked back at the blonde.

"I'll try to keep an open mind, as well as open eyes. I'm not saying I believe you, but I'm willing to observe, to see for myself. When can we meet again?" Draco looked over at the girl in the corner, and silent words passed quickly between them.

"We'll allow you a month to observe for yourself. Meet us here after dinner before the Christmas Holidays. If you've found anything interesting, please let us know. If not, you can just go on your merry way. Either way, I will protect this girl from that man. Hopefully, you'll be on our side." Feeling dismissed, Granger got up from the table. She opened her mouth to say something to the other girl, but something in the girl's face closed her mouth. She just nodded and left. Heaving a huge sigh, Draco went to the girl and held out his hand. She reached for it gratefully, and they left the library together.

"Are you sure we can trust her with all that information?" Phoenix asked.

"Well, it doesn't seem she has any friends, and she seems more closed-mouthed than most. I think she'll approach this situation logically, which will help us in the long run." They quieted down as they approached the dungeons, not wanting to wake anyone. Once they entered the common room, Phoenix put her hands on the walls.

I need a favor.

What would you like, Phoenix?

I need another bed in my room. The holidays are coming, and with everything going on with the headmaster, I don't think I can sleep alone right now.

Would you like privacy screens between the beds?

No. I trust Draco. It'll be like an extended sleepover. I've never had friends to have sleepovers with, so I think it'll be fun.

It is done. Thank you for sharing your power with me again.

You're very welcome.

She stepped away from the walls and reached out to Draco. He took her hand, and she led him to her room. The door opened to reveal bunkbeds. Not quite what Phoenix had in mind, but she was tickled. Draco's eyes widened, and he looked at the girl, surprised.

"I don't like the holidays. With everything going on, I'm afraid the nightmares will come back. I need you in here with me. Is that OK?"

He could only nod.

"I need to go up and get my things." Phoenix snapped her fingers. A house elf appeared, and she told it to get Draco's things from the dorm and bring them to her room. It bowed, popped out, and was back moments later with Draco's trunk and things. She thanked it and it bowed again and popped away. The children went to the trunk and moved it to the foot of the beds. Draco unpacked his suitcase and went to a second closet that had been added for his clothes. They explored the bathroom, where they saw a second sink as well.

"The castle did a little more than I expected. It's almost as if it expects that we'll bunk together for longer. Do you mind that I did this?" she asked again, uncertainly.

“No, not at all. I think it’ll be fun. We’ll get to hang out together all the time now. Since we are bonded, I think this’ll be a good chance to really get to know each other, since everything happened so fast. Maybe I can help you get rid of those memories. Help you make new ones.”

“I’d like that. I want to let go of my past. I want to be able to approach people and not be afraid. I want to be normal.” Draco smiled gently and gave her a hug. She hugged him back, and they got ready for bed. Draco was first, and he took an inordinately long time to get ready. When he finally exited the bathroom, Phoenix was glassy-eyed with exhaustion. She noticed that he was wearing black silk pajama pants and a black tank top. She looked at him for a moment, strange feelings coiling in her belly before she stumbled into the bathroom. She was only in there a few moments, and came out wearing one of the big baggy flannels she loved. It fell to her knees, and Draco’s jaw dropped at the picture she made. He had volunteered to take the top bunk, and she blindly stumbled to the bottom bunk and fell into it. She was asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow, and Draco tucked her under the covers before kissing her forehead and climbing into the bed above her.

The next day saw them still in bed when they were supposed to be in class. A tap at the bedroom door woke Draco up, and he sat up and rubbed his face. His silver eyes blinked blearily for a few moments, and he looked around. His eyes widened as he saw no other beds. Why am I not in the dorms? Then it all came back to him and he leaned over the edge of the bed to look at Phoenix, whose head was buried under the covers. Her ebony locks were strewn over the pillow, and draped over the edge of the bed. The tap at the door came again, and he climbed down and answered it.

“Hey, Uncle Sev. What are you doing here?”

“I’ve come to tell you that your professors have granted you and Phoenix permission to skip classes today so that they can deal with that obnoxious display that occurred in the Great Hall last night. Every student will have a tremendous amount of homework, and they will also have to write an essay on the treatment of others. I have

taken the liberty of bringing your assignments to the common room.” He glanced over at the girl. “How is she?”

“She’s OK for now, Uncle Sev. Granger wanted to talk to us, so we met her in the library last night. I gave her some information. She figured out who Phoenix really is. I didn’t have much choice, and I hope that Granger will be able to see what’s truly going on. As soon as we got back from the library, Phoenix asked the castle to add the extra bed. It also added a closet and an extra sink in the bathroom. She told me that she didn’t want to sleep alone right now. I hope this is OK. I’m not leaving her alone even if it isn’t. What happened last night really shook her up.”

“This is fine. As long as she is comfortable with it, I see no problems. We do have to discuss the sigils on your wrists. I’ve done some research, and have some information on the runic symbols. Please inform Phoenix that I need to see the both of you later today to discuss it.”

“Thank you, Severus,” came a voice from the bed. Phoenix slowly sat up, her hair in disarray, and looked at the professor with those piercing green eyes. “We will be there after your last class.”

“Very well.” He bowed his head to the children and left the common room. Draco closed the door and turned back to the girl in the bed. She smiled widely at him, and his stomach dropped alarmingly. She hopped out of bed and dashed into the bathroom, leaving the boy at the door slightly dazed. He wandered around the room, waiting patiently for his turn, looking at some of the things she had scattered around. He saw no pictures of family or friends, then mentally slapped himself on the forehead. No family or friends, Einstein, he thought. Suddenly he heard a peal of laughter from the bathroom. Did I just broadcast that? he asked her.

Yes you did.

Sorry.

S’ OK. I have friends now, and am learning to love my new family. I am very grateful to you and your parents for making me part of your

family. I've never had that, as you know, and it's a weird feeling to know people actually CARE about me. It's gonna take some getting used to.

I'm very glad you're part of my family as well. You're bound to bring a little excitement to the stuffy pureblood society. I can't wait to see the havoc you'll wreak.

Suddenly, Draco got an image of the lovely girl pouting. She exited the bathroom and looked at him, her emerald eyes glowing with mischief, lower lip pooched out.

"I'm not all that bad, am I?" she asked in a mock-hurt voice.

"I can see it in your eyes. Yes you are that bad. And I love it. My parents' friends won't know what hit them." And Draco laughed loud and long. After a moment of stunned silence, Phoenix joined in, and the mood was infinitely lighter. Draco went in the bathroom, still laughing, and got ready for the day while Phoenix summoned house elves to get them breakfast.

They went out into the common room to eat and do homework. Occasionally, some Slytherin students would filter into the room, and everyone would chat for however long the free periods lasted. The two children were quickly caught up on the gossip and news going through the school. Apparently, Dumbledore made it very clear at breakfast that Mr. Potter was indeed alive, and studying abroad. He had also cancelled Hogsmeade weekends for the rest of the school year for the horrible display last night. Weasel finally showed up to breakfast, but he was very subdued and didn't stay long when he saw that Phoenix wasn't there.

Draco and the girl weren't quite sure what to make of that particular bit of information, but figured that maybe Weasel was tired and his leaving the Hall had nothing to do with Phoenix's absence. However, both children felt that they'd be wise to keep an eye on the redhead anyway. The day passed quickly for them. All too soon it was time for them to meet with Severus, so they slowly left the common room.



I don't know about you, but I'm a little nervous to hear about these designs on our wrists, Phoenix thought.

Why?

I'm not sure. Maybe I'm afraid to learn that I'm as worthless as my relatives told me.

You are NOT worthless! My family and I place great value in you. Therefore, you are not worthless. The girl smiled at this thought.

Thank you. I really needed to hear that. Still doesn't do anything for my nerves.

Draco grabbed her hand, and she instantly calmed down. He smirked.

Oh, shut up.

They got to Severus' office and tapped on the door. "Enter" they heard from the other side, so they opened the door. Snape had set up a table for the discussion, and the kids headed toward it while Severus finished some paperwork.

"Tea?" he asked. The kids shook their heads.

"Pumpkin juice, if you please," the girl said. Instantly, a house elf had a pitcher and two glasses of pumpkin juice on the table. Draco's eyebrows rose to his hairline at the speed. He looked at Snape, who snorted.

"I told the house elves to keep their ears open, and to get you whatever you wanted."

"You mean," Phoenix started, "that I could've had a Pepsi?" At the befuddled looks from both men, she laughed. "Never mind. Can we get this over with please?" Severus' eyebrow quirked at the nervousness obvious in her trembling voice.

"I assure you Phoenix, I've found nothing detrimental in the research. We'll start with you." The professor walked over to the table and sat.

The girl placed her wrist on the table, sigil up. Snape gently took it, and was pleased that the girl didn't flinch from him.

"Your sigil is a butterfly, which is a creator mark. It is a sigil indicating great power, because it indicates that the bearer will have great knowledge, and be a protector. It is a life sigil, with resurrective power. It is a dream carrier, which means that divination will be a natural talent for you. This runic symbol" pointing at the thurisaz, "indicates a history of hardship, of a painful event. This symbol," the gebo, "shows leadership and love. This symbol," the hagalah, "again shows trials, karmic lessons to be learned. This final symbol," the eihwaz, "indicates the confrontation of fears, and a transformation. Near as I can tell, you will have to endure great hardships, and have endured great hardships, but are powerful enough to overcome those hardships and transform, like the butterfly, into a stronger protector and leader. You will achieve great things, paired with your great love; your soul mate." Phoenix looked at the teacher, stunned and speechless. Snape smiled gently at the girl and released her wrist. He then turned to Draco and took his hand.

"Your sigil is the dragon, which is a primal force, a powerful force of nature. The dragon is wise and long-lived. It is also a guardian, which you are for this girl. You are a natural wizard, able to tap into the surrounding magic of the elements and utilize them. You will have tremendous power at your fingertips when you come of age. This rune," pointing at the ansuz, "shows your natural leadership, your strength of purpose. This rune," pointing at the gebo, "is the same as Phoenix's. It is your great love. Your soul mate. That the both of you bear the same rune speaks to the love you will have. This rune," pointing at the algiz, "is also a rune of protection. This one," the sowulo, "indicates success and power. This one," the teiwaz, "indicates a warrior's path. Your runes speak to the power and strength you will have, the leadership that you will obtain, and the protection you will provide for this girl, and eventually for the wizarding world. I see that you will be great in the political arena, and will influence great change for our world." Draco could only stare across at Phoenix. Emerald met silver as they pondered all the information they were just drowned in. Snape left them at the table, still stunned and speechless, giving them a moment to collect their thoughts.

Wow. Just.....wow. I really don't know what to do with this right now.

Draco nodded. See, I told you you weren't worthless. She just smiled.

Days started blending into each other. Classes were fine, and the kids learned a lot. Charms, after the initial dust-up, became Phoenix's best class. She excelled in the casting of charms, and the other students were fascinated in watching the connection between her and her wand. Draco was able to use her wand in the class as well, and sometimes they cast together. However, when they did that, the spells usually took on a life of their own. For instance, they were required to perform the Mobiliarbus spell to make their books move across the desk. Draco and Phoenix, using the Karstjewel wand together, cast the charm and the book flapped itself away. Everyone watched in shocked awe before the entire class collapsed in fits of giggling.

Everyone started to relax around the girl, and she was able to start feeling more normal. The only hitch seemed to be Weasel. He started watching her intently, his blue eyes boring into her. Draco and she would be walking to class or to the Great Hall, and the redhead would be ghosting behind them, quietly stalking them. It got quite creepy, and wore on the girl's nerves badly. Several times Draco had tried to talk to him, to get him to stop, but every time he tried to approach the boy, the redhead would flee.

One day, as Phoenix was walking to the common room alone from the third floor, a hand reached out from an empty classroom and yanked her in. Panic instantly flared within her as she spun away. Weasel stood between her and the closed door, and she wasn't sure where she was.

O god o god o god o god o god

Phoenix, what's wrong?

O god o god o god o god o god

Phoenix?! Draco couldn't get through to her, but he could feel her panic, and started running through the halls looking for her.

Weasel stood staring at the girl, his blue eyes glittering. He started to advance on her, and she backed away, fighting to keep the desks between herself and him. Every time she tried to shift direction toward

the door, he would shift just as quickly, keeping himself as a barrier between her and freedom, safety, and Draco. Fear and nausea rose within Phoenix, and she fought to keep her lunch down. As he came closer, her terror ratcheted up, escalating her already rapid heartbeat. Her heart was beating so hard and so fast that she could feel it pulsing behind her eyes, making her vision grey out at the edges. Suddenly, she felt walls pressing against her back, and she realized that she had literally been backed into a corner. She gasped, crying, and opened her mouth to let loose with a scream. Weasel saw this and his eyes widened. He stumbled forward to press his hand over her open mouth when the door behind them burst open. Draco stood in the doorway, and Weasel spun around at the noise. Draco stalked into the room, knocking desks out of his way, making a beeline for the stunned redhead. He reached Weasel, cocked back his fist and plowed it into the other boy's face, breaking his nose. The boy went down, and the Slytherin stepped around him to get to Phoenix. She collapsed in his arms, and he gently led her out of the room, but not before giving Weasel a punishing kick to his ribs, fracturing two of them.

"If you ever come near her again, they will never find your body. My father can make you disappear in the blink of an eye," the blonde snarled into the reddened face of the boy on the floor. "Consider yourself warned." Then he spat in the upturned face and carefully led the girl back to the common room.

As soon as the children entered the common room, Draco led her directly to their room and put her in the bed. She was still shivering uncontrollably, but her tears had dried. He tried to leave the room to let her rest, but she wouldn't let go of his hand, so he sat on the edge of the bed and carded his fingers through her hair while he waited for her to fall asleep.

Once she had drifted off, Draco left the room and went in search of Severus. The child found the professor in his classroom, making ready for the next class.

"Ron Weasley is in an empty classroom on the third floor. He has a broken nose and most likely some fractured ribs. He attempted to attack Phoenix and I...lost my temper." Snape's eyes widened, and

he fire called Madame Pomfrey to let her know of the injured student. He then bade Draco sit and explain.

"I was in front of the Great Hall, waiting for Phoenix. Suddenly, I felt a huge spike of panic and realized something was wrong. She just kept saying 'o god' in my head, and when I tried to talk to her, I couldn't get through the panic. I ran. I remembered that she had some business on the third floor, so I started there. I heard some shuffling behind one of the empty classroom doors, and threw the door open. She was in the corner, terrified, her mouth open. I think she was getting ready to scream because Weasley had his hand out toward her open mouth. I saw red, Uncle Sev. I couldn't help myself. I plowed through those desks and beat the shit out of him. Then I told him that if he ever came near her again, I would make him disappear. Then I spit in his face. I was just so mad. I know I should be punished for it, but I can't feel sorry. He's been stalking her for days. I tried to talk to him, to warn him off, but he ran every time I tried. I don't know what happened that day in Potions class, but he seems to have developed an obsession for her. And I'm scared." Severus tented his fingers under his chin, deep in thought.

"Is she alright?"

"No. I think this is going to cause nightmares."

"Do you want some Dreamless Sleep?" Draco considered for a moment, then shook his head.

"No, not yet. I need to get back. She's alone right now." Snape nodded, and the blonde left quickly. Severus sat back in his chair and thought about Weasley. I need to get into his head, find out what's going on. What he's thinking when he sees her. Why he felt the need to attack her. He fire called Madame Pomfrey and let her know he would be by to see the Weasley child after classes. She nodded and ended the call.

When Draco got back to the common room, he was surprised to see the door to the bedroom open. He went in to find the gang seated around the bed, with Pansy holding Phoenix's hand. His eyebrows

rose at the sight, and he leaned against the door frame, waiting for an explanation.

"We came in the common room and heard whimpering coming through the door," Pansy began. "We couldn't hear your voice, but we could hear her crying. It sounded...terrified and sad, and we really wanted to get in here to see if she was OK. But we didn't know the password." Tears started to fall from the Slytherin girl's eyes. "We were desperate. The whimpers started getting louder, and we knew she'd start screaming. We tried banging on the door, but she wouldn't wake up. Suddenly the door swung open, and we all came in here to calm her down. I guess the castle let us in..." Pansy's voice trailed off.

"I'm glad you guys are here. We need to talk." Draco moved away from the door and sat at the foot of the bed. Everyone gathered around as he recounted what happened to her. Eyes widened in horror, then narrowed in rage.

"Well," said Blaise, "we can watch her more carefully. She can't be allowed to be alone anywhere anymore. Which means that you, Pansy and Millie, will need to walk with her to the ladies whenever she needs to go. I think Vince and Greg would be the best at actual body guarding," both boys nodded in agreement, "and the rest of us are just friends. We'll watch out for her without making it look like we're watching out for her. She's already having problems being different; no need to make it worse."

"Good thoughts, Blaise," Draco commented. "I'm very tired, so if you guys could just go, I'll take it from here." The kids said their goodbyes and left, closing the door softly behind them. Draco sat on her bed for a few moments more, then got up and changed into his pjs. He was about to climb onto the upper bunk when Phoenix let out a breathy scream. Instantly, the boy climbed onto the bed and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her back into his chest. She trembled harshly for a few moments, taking deep breaths in her fear. Eventually, Draco's scent filtered through the dreams, and she was able to relax. The boy lay there for a while, then attempted to extricate himself so he could climb into his own bed. Phoenix's hands tightened on the arms around her and she started to whimper again.

Draco sighed and retightened his arms, settling behind her into the bed. He closed his eyes and knew no more.

Saturday came, and most of the student body was trying to find something to do, since Hogsmeade was off-limits to everyone. Phoenix stretched, feeling arms around her waist. She wasn't afraid, though, because she could smell the scent of Draco surrounding her, and she knew she was safe. She turned in his arms and looked at his sleeping face. The blonde hair fell over his forehead, and she reached up to brush it away. The light touch of her fingers to his skin caused those silver eyes to open and look at her. Her emerald eyes met his, and they looked at each other for long moments, thoughts and feelings flashing back and forth between them. He leaned over and brushed his lips to her forehead, and she shifted and leaned her head on his shoulder. They cuddled like that for a while, his fingers playing with her long ebony hair.

There was a tap on the door, and Draco extracted himself from the bed and went to open it. Standing outside was the gang, all with worried faces. He stepped back, and the group entered the room, spied Phoenix awake on the bed and hurried over, all talking at once. The girl on the bed laughed and held up a hand.

"Wait....wait.....wait. One at a time." Millie spoke for the group.

"We were so worried. You were making noises in here last night, and it scared us. We couldn't get in because we don't know the password. The castle finally had to let us in."

"I'm OK. Thanks for worrying. The password for the door is family. So you can come in anytime now. You're all part of my family now." Tears shone in the girls' eyes, and the boys had to clear their throats a couple of times. Draco stepped toward the bed, smiling.

"We've decided," he began, "to escort you everywhere. Now, before you get too upset, the only ones to appear as authentic bodyguards are Vince and Greg. The rest of us, as your friends, will always be around. You are not going anywhere in this castle alone ever again. If you need to go anywhere, get one of us. One of us will always be available. No arguments. I don't want to take the chance that Weasel



will try a repeat performance. I talked to Uncle Sev. I think he's going to do some investigating himself." At that moment, Severus appeared in the open doorway of the bedroom.

"Very astute deduction, Draco," he drawled. "I went to see Mr. Weasley last night while he was recovering in the hospital wing. I looked into his mind to see what spurred his...obsession, for lack of a better term. It seems that he believes that Ms. Evans is for the taking. Apparently, he took the memories of your abuse as promiscuity on your part, and felt he had the perfect right to take what you so freely offer. I am sorry that this had to happen, but you no longer need worry about Mr. Weasley. I took the opportunity to Obliviate him, so he has no memory of your abuse, or of his attack. You are now safe from him. I do believe, however, that you do need to be escorted everywhere in the castle. Dumbledore is still a very real threat, and we cannot take chances with your safety."

"We've already decided to make sure that Phoenix is never alone in the castle, Uncle Sev. By the way, next Wednesday is when we'll be meeting Granger to see what she thinks about Dumbledore. We would like it if you could somehow manage to be there to listen in. Just in case things get a little complicated. I don't expect trouble from the girl, but we can't be sure."

Severus nodded and left. The kids spent the rest of the day in the bedroom, playing games and listening to music. They had the house elves bring them food when they wanted. No one wanted to face any of the other students, especially since most of them blamed Phoenix for not being able to go to Hogsmeade.

The rest of the weekend passed fairly quietly. Phoenix was never left alone; she always had one of the gang with her no matter where she went. Draco was a constant comforting presence as well, and for the first time, the girl actually felt a strong part of a cohesive family group. She'd never felt so protected or secure before, and the warm feelings of comfort and safety filled her soul as nothing else could.

Monday came, and with it the return to classes. The first class of the day was Potions, and it was also the first class that Phoenix would have to see Weasel in. Normally, Draco and she would take the desk

at the front of the class, with the rest of her group in the desks surrounding it, but today she decided she wanted to sit in the back corner furthest away from the door. She sat against the wall, and Draco sat beside her. The rest of the group sat in the desks surrounding them, and in this way the girl was fully insulated from everyone else. The other students noticed the change in position, as did Snape, but made no comment. Weasel finally entered the room at the last minute, and Phoenix's heart leapt in her chest in terror. Draco quickly took her hand to calm her, and her friends all sat up straighter, looking more alert and a little more intimidating. She relaxed and smiled, looked at Draco gratefully, and turned her attention to the Potions professor. During the class, she would make surreptitious glances toward the redhead, but he never looked at her. It was almost as if she didn't exist, and she breathed a huge sigh of relief and was able to relax completely and pay attention to the lesson.

After class, the gang waited until the rest of the class left before exiting themselves. And that was how the rest of the day went. Weasel never troubled the girl again, and she was able to get back into the routine of school. She was never left alone, however. She was always cocooned in the safety of her Slytherin family.

Wednesday after dinner found the pair in the library, at the same table. Phoenix still sat in a chair in the corner, and Snape stood behind her. When Granger arrived, her eyes widened at the sight of the Potions professor, and she hesitated a fraction before taking the same seat she had taken the month prior. Phoenix still eyed the girl with suspicion, and her nervousness transmitted to the professor, who gently laid his hand on the girl's shoulder. She relaxed, knowing she was protected and safe. Granger watched this exchange, a deep frown marring her face and confusion in her eyes. She then turned her eyes to Draco, and waited.

"When Harry came back as Phoenix," Draco began, "Dumbledore wasn't pleased. He visited Professor Snape and told him the fabricated history of her past. He then threatened the professor that he would be punished should he not report all activities to the headmaster. Before he left Professor Snape's rooms, he cast an unforgivable on him. I'll let the professor tell you that part."

Snape looked at the girl at the table, eyes unflinching, as he recounted the pain of the Crucio. As he spoke, Granger's eyes got wider and wider. As he finished, the bushy-haired girl nodded to herself and thought for a moment. She appeared to gather her thoughts, and then she began to speak.

"I overheard a conversation between the headmaster and Professor McGonagall. She was furious at the treatment of Ha-Phoenix, and was telling the headmaster about it. The headmaster laughed and said that such treatment would 'toughen her up.' McGonagall was furious at this response and screamed at him that if he didn't punish the student body more severely, she would go to the Daily Prophet and tell about how the headmaster had allowed the physical assault of an eleven year old girl by the entire school. She then said that she'd provide pensieve memories to corroborate the story. I heard the headmaster choke, and then he said he'd enact a school wide punishment. He sounded enraged at the blackmail. I couldn't believe the man we all think as benevolent would be so nasty to one girl. Why? Why is he doing this? Why is he spreading what are obviously lies about the 'legend' of Harry Potter?"

"As I told you, he's after her power. You've seen what a powerful witch she is now; just imagine when she reaches adulthood. When she's been properly trained. She will be virtually unstoppable, and it's this potential that Dumbledore wants to exploit. He wants to keep the wizarding world in chaos until he gets her powers. Once he gets her powers, he'll become human and immortal. He will be able to affect the living world in a more real and concrete way. He will be able to breed chaos and strife and destruction, thereby allowing his kind free reign."

"Wait, what do you mean 'his kind'?"

"He's a Djinn. Haven't you ever noticed how little you see him? He can only maintain his human form for short periods of time. With her power at its peak, he'll be able to become the most powerful magical being in existence. He'll be able to free all the Djinn, and that will be the end of the wizarding and muggle worlds as we know them."

Granger absorbed this information, her brow wrinkled. She nodded to the three once more then got up and left. Draco sat for a few moments, a puzzled look on his face. He then turned to Severus and Phoenix, the confusion still evident. He quirked an eyebrow at them and they both shrugged, also nonplussed. With a sigh, Draco rose from the table and reached out a hand to Phoenix. They said their goodbyes to Severus and went back to the common room, questions about the bushy-haired girl swimming in their heads.

Draco and Phoenix were rushing to get everything packed so they could make the carriages taking them to the Express. Phoenix was excited to be able to go to Malfoy Manor for the holidays. She found she missed Draco's parents; they honestly felt like her own parents. Finally packed, the kids ran down to the main doors while the house elves took the luggage to the carriages. The two were able to get a carriage with Pansy, Blaise, Millie, Vince and Greg, and they talked and laughed all the way to the train. On the train, they once again took a car for themselves and lowered the shades, locking the door so they wouldn't be interrupted. The trip was spent talking about Christmas. Phoenix had never really had a Christmas, and was looking forward to the first one that would be spent in a real family atmosphere. She was falling hard for Draco, and loved his friends and his parents. The weekend training sessions hadn't started yet; Lucius was having some difficulties with some business deals and was distracted. He had owed Draco and told him that things would be better after the first of the year, and that they'd be able to start training then. Phoenix was disappointed, but she understood.

The train pulled into King's Cross on time, and the children waited until everyone disembarked before they left their car. The other Slytherins went through the barrier first, leaving Phoenix and Draco last. The girl went through the barrier and stopped dead, causing Draco to slam into her as he exited the barrier. She stumbled forward a little at the impact, but still remained rooted to the spot, staring. On the sidewalk outside the station stood pigman, lady pigman and her cousin. Here to pick her up for the holidays. Near them stood the Malfoys, smiles wreathing their faces as they saw the children. Draco saw the terror on Phoenix's face but couldn't quite understand it. He grabbed her hand and started dragging her toward the exit, waving at

his parents.

They finally reached the Malfoys, who had reached out to take the children's hands, when pigman spoke up.

"Oi! What the hell do you think you're doing? Get your bloody hands off her!" Phoenix flinched away from the voice. Instantly, Narcissa and Lucius stepped in front of the child, creating a barrier. Draco stepped to her side and put an arm around her waist, supporting her weight as she sagged against him. Pigman attempted to reach around the Malfoys to grab the girl's hand, to find a dagger suddenly at his throat.

"You lay a hand on that child and I will gut you. She is now a Malfoy which means you no longer have claim to her."

"That old wizard pays us good money to keep her for him. She's mine until he takes her. He said so."

"She is a Malfoy. No one has claim to her. She is part of our family. You'll not get near her again. Nor will that old wizard. Now leave, else I split you from navel to nose." Lucius put the dagger away as pigman stepped away. The Malfoys gathered the children and quickly went to the car, getting in and closing the door. As they pulled away, they saw pigman gesturing to a bobby. The bobby looked toward the car, but couldn't see anything, as the car was magicked to be invisible to law enforcement. The officer shook his head and walked away from the quickly reddening fat man. Phoenix relaxed into her seat and gave a tremulous smile to her new family.

"Thank you," she said. "For saving my life."

A/N: Thanks to a reviewer, I corrected a mistake. I forgot that Thanksgiving is a completely American holiday.....damn pilgrims! Sorry about that!

---

---

They arrived at Malfoy Manor, and the kids leapt out of the car and barreled into the house. They took the stairs two at a time to get to their rooms, where Phoenix crashed on her bed and heaved a huge sigh of relief. She really thought that pigman would get her. She was upset when she heard that Dumbledore was paying them to keep her; but what really hurt was that the old man told pigman that she belonged to him until Dumbledore wanted her. As if she were a whore. Something to be bought and sold.

Draco entered her room and saw her on the bed, her face a mask of pain and sorrow and he climbed on, pulling her into his arms to comfort her. She was trembling, and tears were just below the surface.

"Shhhh," he murmured in her ear. "Everything's OK. You're safe. Nothing will get you here. That nasty piece of shit has no claim on you. No one owns you." He smirked. "Except maybe for me." She laughed and relaxed into his arms, feeling safe again. They sat like that for a while, thinking, when there was a tap on the door. Lucius entered the room and saw the children cuddled together on the bed. His eyebrows rose when Phoenix's eyes met his and there was still lingering sorrow and fear in them.

"Do not fear, little one," he said quietly. "There is no law that will return you to that despicable man. You are a Malfoy. You will always be a Malfoy. There is no greater protection or safety than family, and you are part of ours." She smiled at him, then ran into his arms, squeezing his waist tightly. He smiled down at her, patting her back, joyous at the love the girl was showing him. "We have brunch waiting in the solarium. Please join us."

Phoenix's stomach agreed, and she held her hand out to the golden boy on the bed. They grasped hands and went down the stairs

together, walking to the open, sunlit room and sitting at the small table there. They sat in a companionable silence for a time, eating and enjoying the day. The scents of Christmas filled the air; turkey with stuffing, cranberries, pumpkin pie. As this was Phoenix's first real Christmas, she breathed deeply, enjoying the scents of home and love and family. Tears started to fall, and she turned away from everyone to try to marshal her rampaging emotions. Suddenly, she felt the warmth of love through the bond, and it comforted and calmed her. She turned back to the table, giving a small, watery smile as explanation.

"How has school been?" Narcissa decided to break the silence. The children glanced at each other, then Draco spoke up.

"Shortly after we got back, after the ceremony here, Weasley accused me of murdering Potter. He was threatening, Phoenix got mad, and lashed out at him. Unfortunately, she fed him some of the memories of the abuse. He took that as permission to try to molest her, so I...beat him. Uncle Sev Obliviated him and we haven't had any problems with him since. Dumbledore put out the message that Potter was in the Americas, learning military and tactical magic. No one believed it and one night at dinner, almost everyone in the Great Hall decided to throw everything they had on hand at us. Dumbledore suspended Hogsmeade visits for the entire year. But only after McGonagall threatened to go to the Daily Prophet with the story that Dumbledore allowed the assault of a student. Didn't go to Halloween feast; couldn't face all those people in one place. My friends and I have been acting as escorts and bodyguards for her, so Dumbledore can't get near her. Oh, yeah, I think Granger might actually be on board with us. She saw through the Potter ruse when we got back, and has been observing some of the headmaster's misdeeds. Classes are going well. We can't use her wand at the same time; it causes unusual reactions. In Charms, when we tried to do a Mobiliarbus charm, instead of the book sliding across the desk, it flew out the door, flapping away like a big paper bird. It was really quite funny. Other than that, business as usual."

Both parents' eyebrows were in their hairlines at this. They were completely unaware of the assaults on the children, and were visibly upset that they weren't informed. Well, they had the next two weeks

together to get to know each other better. Draco's parents realized that they would have to spend a lot of time reassuring Phoenix that she was wanted, safe and loved. And they were willing to take all the time needed to do just that.

After brunch, the children were bade to follow Lucius into the library. Here, he pulled down photo albums and handed them to the children. The kids leafed through the memories in the pages, occasionally pointing at pictures and asking questions. For Draco, this was a renewal, a ritual repeated many times over the years during the holidays. For Phoenix, this was a new thing, an introduction to the family she had become part of. There were baby pictures of the elder Malfoys, baby pictures of Draco (which caused him to blush profusely when Phoenix lovingly stroked a finger over them, cooing), family gatherings with many, many platinum blondes in attendance-How am I going to keep all of them straight?! They all look alike!!-and some pictures of a wild-eyed dark haired woman. The girl looked up at Lucius questioningly.

"That's Bellatrix. Narcissa's sister. She inherited the Black family genes, hence the wild eyes and dark hair, and insanity. She was deeply in love with Rodolpho Lestrangle. He worked as an Auror for the Ministry of Magic." At Phoenix's confused look, Lucius elaborated. "An auror is like the muggle police detectives. They investigate crimes and hunt down criminals. To continue, Lestrangle had proposed to Bellatrix, and they were to be married. Unfortunately, one of the cases Lestrangle was investigating didn't turn out well, and he was killed. His loss drove her insane. She's been in St. Mungo's for a long time. They don't think she'll ever recover."

Will that happen to me? Will I go insane if I lose you? There was panic in the girl's thoughts.

You won't lose me, Draco reassured. I'm too arrogant and mean to die. Phoenix snorted inelegantly, which caused Lucius to raise an eyebrow. She blushed and looked back at the pictures. There were pictures of Severus with the Malfoys, and Severus with a beautiful auburn-haired green eyed woman. She looked back up at Lucius and quirked a curious eyebrow.



“Who is this with Severus?”

“That was Lily Evans. They were so in love with each other. She was a muggleborn, and when Severus’ father found out, he killed her. Said no son of his was going to rut with a Mudblood and push out squib children.” The raven-haired girl looked at the happy couple in the picture, suddenly saddened at the loss of love and a chance at a beautiful life for the Potions professor. She was fascinated by the brilliant green eyes that so looked like her own.

“Have you ever flown on a broom?” Draco suddenly asked in the heavy silence. Phoenix looked at him like he was nuts and shook her head. “Come on, we have the top of the line brooms in the broom shed by the Quiddich pitch.” The girl’s brow wrinkled further at the mention of the game, and Draco laughed. “That’s right, you don’t know about Quiddich, either. Well, I’m just going to have to teach you. Come on, let’s go flying.” Unsure what to make of the bizarre invitation, Phoenix nevertheless closed the album, placed it gently on the table in front of her, and left with Draco out the garden doors. They ran to the broom shed where, sure enough, there were many, many brooms of all different sizes and colors. Her eyes widened comically as she took in all the brooms.

I always thought they were just for SWEEPING!

These are special brooms, not like the muggle ones. These fly!

Show me!

Laughing joyfully, Draco grabbed a broom for himself, and picked out a slower, safer model for Phoenix. They ran to the pitch, where the blonde threw his leg over the broomstick and kicked off from the ground. He sailed up into the air, doing loop-the-loops and other aerobatics, showing off to the very stunned girl on the ground. Her emerald eyes followed his every graceful move, and she laughed with delight as she saw him take risky chances. It was as he was making a series of complicated loops and spirals in the air that a very large bird with brilliant red plumage, looking almost flame-like, blasted through the wards and knocked him off of his broom. He was very

high up, and the ground was hardened by frost. He tumbled, boneless, as he fell, and Phoenix shrieked.

“Draco!” Her magic swirled out and reached for the boy, greatly slowing down his fall. It didn’t prevent him from hitting the earth, but it greatly lessened the damage the fall would’ve inflicted. She pelted toward him, fear and despair warring within her. She could still feel his presence in her head, but was too panicked to realize what that meant.

I’m alright, she heard muzzily in her head.

Are you sure?

Just some bumps and bruises, and I think I have a broken rib from that damn bird, but I’m ok. Go get Father.

I can’t just leave you here! What if the bird comes back?

Call a house elf, then. I can’t move on my own.

Phoenix clapped her hands and a house elf popped into view next to her.

“Erm, I don’t know your name, but I need you to go to Mr. Malfoy and get him. Draco’s hurt and we need help.”

“Jadie do what you ask,” the elf responded. Phoenix relaxed only slightly as the elf popped out. She sat by Draco and gently pulled his head onto her lap, stroking the blonde strands of hair away from his pain-filled silver eyes. Tears had started falling and they dropped unchecked onto his cheeks. She gave him a watery smile and bent to kiss the teardrops away. He smiled up at her through his pain; suddenly there were pops as Lucius and Narcissa both appeared at the Quiddich pitch. They rushed forward and gently cast Mobilicorpus to levitate him into the house. A healer had been summoned and was waiting when they got there. A quick scan revealed a broken rib, a small lung puncture and some bruises. The Malfoys sighed in relief as they heard the prognosis. Draco would have to stay in bed for a couple of days, but he’d be good to go.

“Does that mean I don’t get Christmas dinner?” he whined.

“We’ll have dinner up here with you. No sense in forgoing the holiday traditions just because you couldn’t handle a broom,” his father replied sardonically.

“It wasn’t my fault! A big red bird breached the wards and knocked me off.” Phoenix concurred.

“It looked like that red bird that Dumbledore keeps in his office.”

“Sounds like Dumbledore is trying to take away your support system,” Narcissa opined. “He must not know of the bond between the two of you. He could use that to try and weaken you.”

“I, for one, would like to know how it managed to breach the wards. Our wards are of the strongest magic. That was no easy feat to accomplish,” Lucius growled. He hated feeling insecure and unsafe in his own home.

“I know someone who will be able to help us strengthen our wards against lost souls,” Narcissa replied. “We will not be vulnerable for long.” Draco’s parents left then, talking about the wards, leaving the children in the room. Draco patted his bed in invitation, and the girl gladly climbed up beside him. They interlaced their fingers and sat there in companionable silence for a time.

How did you stop me from falling? Draco finally asked.

I don’t know. I saw you falling, and I was so afraid. I didn’t want to lose you, not since I just found you, and I guess my magic responded to that. I didn’t know I could do that.

Thank you. You most likely saved my life. I guess this means I owe you a Life Debt.

Erm...what is a Life Debt?

“Well,” Draco said aloud, “when someone saves another’s life, that saved person owes the person who saved them their life. It’s a wizarding code of honor, and must be fulfilled. I am honor-bound to fulfill the Life Debt in whatever manner you require.”

“I don’t want that. I feel like I’ve just bought a slave by saving you. And we are bonded. Doesn’t that take precedent over the Life Debt?”

“No. But that will make the claiming of the Debt sweeter.” At this reply, Phoenix blushed profusely. They played several games of Exploding Snap, and Draco made a valiant attempt to teach the girl how to play Wizard’s Chess, but she frustrated him to no end. She was always able to get him out of his frustration by smiling sweetly and looking deeply into his silver eyes with her glowing emerald ones. When she did that, he blushed and stammered. Unknown to them, the last exchange was witnessed by the elder Malfoys, who thought it was charming. At Narcissa’s fond chuckle, both kids jumped and blushed, Draco’s even brighter.

“Dinner will be here shortly.” With that announcement, she waved her wand and transfigured a dining table with three chairs. Since Draco was on strict bed rest, he would eat his meal there. Phoenix, seeing the sadness in his face, decided she would sit next to him on the bed and eat there as well. This brightened the boy’s mood, and when dinner appeared, everyone tucked in. Phoenix just stared at the family enjoying the meal, still afraid that she was intruding on private time. Draco sensed her mood, felt the sadness filter through to him, and reached over to her plate. He grabbed a small piece of turkey and gently held it to her lips. She opened her mouth, surprise coloring her green eyes and he slid the food into her mouth. She closed her lips on his fingers for a moment, her tongue licking the gravy off of the tips, and he blushed furiously as hot sensations flooded his body. He jerked his hand back quickly, and the warm comfort in the bond suddenly changed to something exciting and scary. She blushed furiously, smiled softly, and bowed her head over her plate. This is love.

That night, a cry rent the peace. Draco was instantly awake, knowing what the sound was and where it came from. Despite still feeling achy, he crawled from his bed and entered the bedroom next to his. The

raven-haired girl was thrashing around violently on her bed, crying out. He hobbled over to her and grabbed her shoulders, trying to calm her. She lashed out with her fist and connected with his jaw. It wasn't hard enough to hurt, but it was hard enough to startle the blonde. He jerked back, and Phoenix bolted upright in her bed, her green eyes wide and panicked. She gasped in terror, before finally focusing on silver eyes. He was rubbing his jaw, staring at the girl. Tears started to fall from her eyes, and she launched herself at the boy. His arms came around her, holding her tight. She cried out her pain and fear on his shoulder as he rocked her back and forth. Eventually, she grew sleepy again, and he lay her back on the bed. He rose to leave and she grabbed his hand, tugging him back into the bed. He climbed in behind her and pulled her against him. She sighed and fell asleep. He lay there for a while, stroking her hair and breathing in her scent, falling deeper in love with her. Eventually, her warmth and fragrance soothed him to sleep.

It was Saturday before Draco was allowed out of bed. His parents saw him in the bed with Phoenix and read him the riot act, telling him he was not to leave his room until the Healer cleared him. Saturday morning saw the Healer there early to do one last diagnostic scan on the boy. He was cleared, and he fairly leapt out of bed in his excitement, dressing quickly and running to the girl's room. He burst in, finding the bed empty but hearing the shower. He waited impatiently for her to finish, anxious to spend time with her. He still wanted to teach her to fly.

Hurry up! I still want to teach you to fly!

Where are you?

I'm in your room.

Laughter was heard from the bathroom. Ok, I'll be out in a few moments.

When she finally emerged from the bathroom, Draco had paced a hole in the carpet.

“Finally,” he grouched. The scent of her soap and shampoo were intoxicating, and he forgot why he was grumpy. He grinned, grabbed her hand and pulled her downstairs.

“Father, we’re going flying,” the blonde announced as the pair headed toward the garden doors.

“Stop right there,” Lucius ordered. The children halted and turned, trepidation on their faces. “You cannot go flying. The wards haven’t been strengthened yet. Dumbledore’s ‘pet’ could attack again, and this time he may succeed. We cannot take that chance, especially with you, Phoenix. I’m sorry.” Dejected, the kids flounced into the library, hoping to find something there with which to amuse themselves. They decided to play two-person hide and seek, with Draco being it first. As Phoenix didn’t know the Manor well, she got pretty lost. She ducked into an unused room, hoping he could find her, since she couldn’t find her own way back. Minutes passed with no sign or sound of the boy and she started to panic.

Draco?!

Are you ok, Phoenix?

No. I’m lost. I don’t really know where I am.

Hang on. I’ll find you. Just concentrate. Maybe the bond will lead me to you.

Ok.What do I concentrate on?

Try using happy memories. I think I can find you that way.

I’ll try, but we both know I have almost no happy memories.

Just try, ok? She concentrated, thinking of any happy memories. What came to her in a flash was her very first meeting with the boy in Madame Malkin’s. The tentative pull of his beauty. The thought of his angelic face, silvery blonde hair glowing ethereally in the sunlight from the windows. His smile and easy friendliness in his eyes. The beginning blossoms of something more, glowing deep in her heart,

her soul. Soon, she heard footsteps outside the room and opened the door. There was her golden and beautiful boy, a smile lighting his face at the sight of her. She was so relieved she threw herself into his arms and kissed him full on the lips. He was shocked and froze for a moment. She pulled back quickly, her face suffused with color.

"I-I'm sorry. I d-didn't mean to d-do that. Please don't be mad." He placed his hand on her cheek, stroking it gently with his fingers.

"Why would I be mad? We are bonded, and getting closer. We're getting to know each other, and you're becoming more comfortable around me. You're trusting me more and more. I like kissing you. And I like that you feel safe enough to kiss me. I could never be mad at you for showing me affection. I do think, however, that you need to start talking about what happened with Dursley. I understand how painful that would be for you, but you will never be able to heal until you exorcise those demons. The memories will always have power over you because you allow them the power. Once you share those memories with people who love you, you take away that power."

"I know I need to talk about my past, but I'm afraid that, once you and your parents hear it, you won't want me anymore. I'm afraid of losing the only support system, the only real family I've ever had." Tears had started to run freely down her face as she spoke, and fear made her voice tremble. Draco took her into his arms, feeling her tremble, and whispered reassuring words into her ear.

"You have nothing to worry about," he sighed into her ear. "There is nothing you could tell us that would make us love you any less. We know that everything done to you was not your fault. You asked for none of it, and deserved none of it. There is nothing you could possibly have done to warrant being treated like that. He's the adult, you are a child. He is the one at fault; he is the one to blame. He is the one to own this sin, not you." She calmed at his words, and knew he was right. She still couldn't help feeling that, once her shameful secrets were revealed, she would lose everything that had become vital to her survival. Feeling calmer, she stepped back from the boy and took his hand, smiling at him.

“Can you lead me out of here? And maybe a tour of the mansion, with accompanying map, so I don’t get lost next time.” He smirked at her and laughed as he led her away. As they walked, he showed her the various rooms, corridors, and empty spaces that made up the Manor. He didn’t show her the cellar rooms, because it was dank, dark and musty down there. Lord only knew what creepy-crawlies lived down there. They finally made it to the library, where Lucius was looking over some paperwork.

“Father, we need to talk about Phoenix’s past. She needs to air it out, so she can start to heal.”

“I agree. I think tonight would be an opportune time to help you exorcise those demons.” Unknowingly, he mirrored his son’s very words earlier, and Phoenix smiled at how alike the two male Malfoys were.

“I’m not looking forward to reliving that nightmare, but I do understand that I have to vomit up the sickness in my head. I just don’t want to lose any of you....” Lucius nodded in understanding, but he made no steps to reassure the girl at the moment. He knew that the reassurances would seem empty, since no one had actually heard of the horrors. Draco had an idea, but he wasn’t aware of the full extent of the abuse. Being a child, he was optimistically sure that it couldn’t be that bad. But Lucius knew better. And he was terrified of what he would hear come nightfall.



A/N: I didn't like writing the abuse segment. Hated it. Made me sick. But it is necessary for story. Please don't be offended, and please, if you've been a victim, I am very sorry. Future talks of the abuse will be vague and hinted at.

---

---

Everyone was gathered in the family room. Draco and Phoenix were sitting on a settee together, and Lucius and Narcissa had bracketed them, sitting in chairs on either side of the sofa. They had spoken of bringing in a Mind Healer to help the girl with the memories, but she was adamant. She didn't want total strangers listening to her private shame. For a time, they all just sat, deep in their own thoughts. Lucius was the first to break the silence.

"How far back can you remember?"

"I have memories from when I was three. I have no real memories after the age of six because that was when he started drugging me. I was starting to use magic to keep him away, and he didn't like it." Lucius' eyes widened in horror; he didn't expect that it would have started when she was so young. He shuddered, hoping that they wouldn't be doing greater harm to the girl by making her relive the horror. Taking a deep, steadying breath, he asked her to begin.

She looks up from her blankets on the floor of the cupboard, seeing his large frame looming over her. He reaches down to pick her tiny body up, grabbing her by the arms. He backs out of the cupboard, not watching how he carries her, bumping her head on the door frame. She cries out in pain, and he slaps her to shut her up. She cries louder, and he clamps a large hand over her face, nearly covering her nose as he covers her mouth. She gasps for air, smelling gardening soil and ink and paper on his hands. Tears stream down her face as he carries her up the stairs. He takes her to the unused bedroom at the top of the stairs, where a bare mattress has been thrown on the floor. He drops her onto the mattress, her head bouncing, pain rocketing through it. She whimpers as he closes and locks the door. She wants to run, but her little three-year-old body is weakened from not eating regularly. She still wears diapers; no one wanted to take

the time to potty-train her, and they dig into her skin as he rips them off. She lays on the mattress, exposed, only a filthy t-shirt covering her. His eyes stare hungrily at the child's body, and he reaches down to touch her. He opens his trousers, his cock already hard. She stares at him, not knowing what is happening, or what he's going to do. All she knows is that he's scaring her, and she starts to cry piteously. He climbs onto the mattress, hovering over her, playing with his penis. He picks up her hips and positions himself at her entrance. He thrusts in cruelly and quickly and she screams at the top of her lungs as she feels something HUGE ripping her apart. He thrusts into her again and again and again, ignoring the screams and the blood that starts to flow. When he finishes, she is semi-conscious, bleeding badly and bruised. He leaves her there to bleed, walking to the bathroom to clean up before Petunia gets home. It is while he is gone that she performs her first bit of accidental magic and heals herself. She doesn't make the bruises go away, but the bleeding stops. She staggers to her feet and makes her way slowly down the stairs to her cupboard, where she closes the door quietly. She curls up on her blankets and cries, her soul as broken as her body.

As she spoke, pouring out the poison that was her past, the Malfoys became quieter and quieter. At one point, as she cried through the memories, Draco tried to hold her hand. She flinched away from him, still deep within her horror, and he could only sit there, trying to comfort her and cocoon her in the love he felt. He was very proud of the courage it took for her to relive the nightmares, but he was horrified at the extent of the pain and torture inflicted on her from such a young age. He looked at his parents, and saw the same thoughts reflected in their faces. Her voice never changed inflection; in fact, it was void of emotion altogether. The only indication of the turmoil and agony she was feeling was the silent tears coursing down her face. The unending river of tears spoke to the emotions she had kept bottled up all those years.

Finally, the torrent of horror ended, and everyone was left with the pervading sadness for the girl. She had, by this time, curled up in Draco's lap, his arms wrapped snugly around her. He rocked her gently as he whispered encouraging words in her ear. Her tears had finally ended, and the wet streaks down her face slowly dried in the waning fire in the fireplace. The elder Malfoys sat, looking at each

other, each lost in thoughts of the terror the girl had suffered for much of her life. They thought of the man who put her there, and of the revenge they wanted to wreak on him. They thought of friends who could, for a price, remove the Dursley disease from their daughter's life. And, mainly, they thought of what they could do to show their love for her, to help her heal and move on. They hadn't counted on missing giving presents on Christmas, with everything that was going on, so they decided to do the gift exchange on Sunday.

"Since we missed giving presents on Christmas, we'll do the gift exchange tomorrow. We know you haven't had a chance to shop, so we have some owl-order catalogues you can look through. Make your selections, and send off the orders. Everything should arrive tomorrow. Specify gift wrapping, as you aren't allowed to cast spells at this time." Phoenix was recovered enough to take the catalogue, and Draco also took one. They went to their individual rooms to study the catalogue and make their selections.

Draco studied his catalogue very closely, knowing what he chose for his intended must be very special. He leafed through the book, marking things for his parents, but didn't think anything else was suitable until he reached the back pages. There he found the perfect thing, and immediately marked it down for order. With his order done, he called for his owl and sent the money and order off.

Phoenix had the same trouble finding something for Draco. She had found things for Narcissa and Lucius very quickly, but still struggled for Draco, until she reached the back pages. There, she found the perfect thing and called Hedwig, who had come with her, to make the order delivery. She was happy that she had found just the perfect thing for her love. Comforted, and oddly emotionally empty, she drifted off to sleep.

Screams rent the night as Phoenix relived the horrors of her childhood. Draco dashed into her room, leaping onto the bed and wrapping her in his arms. She shuddered against him, crying in anguish. The elder Malfoys stood at the door, shaking with fear at the sound of the girl's screams. They tentatively approached the bed with the girl on it, and she looked at them, her green eyes swimming in fear and pain. She held her arms out to them, silently begging for

comfort, and they rushed to her, engulfing her in soft, soothing hugs. She sobbed her memories all over their clothes, and they murmured comforting words of love and safety and peace to her. She finally calmed, and Draco looked at his parents, a question in his eyes. They nodded imperceptibly, and he curled up behind her, holding her tightly to his chest, cuddling her safely in his arms. He kissed her shoulder, pulled the blankets over themselves and settled her and himself into the bed. In a very short time she drifted back to sleep. Draco stayed awake for a while, stroking her hair and worrying at how she would cope once they went back to school. The horrors were loose now, and there was no way to lock them away again. He knew this was only the beginning, and that she had a long road ahead of her.

Morning came, and with it the anticipation of Christmas gifts to be given. Though it was late, the family had decided to make a true celebration of it. So when the kids finally woke up and ventured downstairs, they found the tree in the family room covered with small packages hanging from the boughs, and heaps of gifts under the tree. Phoenix had never had a Christmas present, nor a birthday present, for that matter. She had never had anything given to her. She had been forced to sneak and steal what she needed to survive, which explained why she was small for an eleven-year-old. So when she saw that there were packages with her name on them, she was stunned and speechless. She sat heavily in the same settee she and Draco had shared the night before, watching as Draco gleefully handed out packages to everyone. Traditionally, the unwrapping went from oldest to youngest, to teach patience, but this year, they decided to go from youngest to oldest. They all looked at her expectantly, and she looked back, puzzled. Draco's birthday was one month before hers, and she didn't know it, but she was the youngest, though she felt centuries old. They nodded at her; she got to go first.

The two largest were from Lucius and Narcissa, and contained Dark Arts texts (Lucius) and special journals magicked specifically to Phoenix (Narcissa). The final gift was a very small box. When she unwrapped it, the paper revealed a small velvet ring box. She looked at Draco with wide eyes. He smiled shyly at her and took the box from her nerveless fingers. Opening it, she saw a beautiful gold ring

with a brilliant fiery opal surrounded by diamonds. It was delicate and fragile-looking.

“This is a promise ring. It will show the world that you are committed to me. That you belong to me. I want the world to know that you are mine, and are protected. May I?” At her shy nod, he gently slid the ring on the ring finger of her left hand, where it sized itself. It was spelled to grow with her finger, so it would never be tight. She smiled as she looked at the ring, happiness making her heart burst.

Then it was Draco’s turn. He opened the gifts from his parents, which included Quiddich gear and the same Dark Arts texts. When he got to the gift from Phoenix, butterflies set flight in her stomach. His, too, was a small box. Under the paper was a small velvet ring box. He looked at her in stunned surprise as she gently took the box from his hand and opened it. Inside was a wide gold band with a perfect square-cut yellow diamond in the center. She shyly held her hand out for his left hand, which he gladly gave to her. She then slid the ring on his left hand ring finger, where it sized itself. It, too, was spelled to resize for growth, and both children knew they were claimed. The world would now know that they were claimed.

Narcissa was next, and she unwrapped the gift from Lucius first, which was an angora stole, very fuzzy and very softly pink. Draco’s present to her was a merry-go-round music box, charmed to play whatever tune matched his mother’s mood, and Phoenix had given her an antique cameo brooch that had belonged to Salazar Slytherin’s mother. She had found it in an old junk shop off of Diagon Alley, after they had met at the ice cream shop. She didn’t know why she had bought it; she had felt the magic in the brooch, and it called to her. Narcissa’s eyes widened when she read the inscription on the back: To the best mum in the world, Love Sallie. She could feel the protective magic surrounding the pin, and kissed Phoenix’s cheek.

Lucius was last, and from Narcissa, he received midnight blue velvet lounging robes. Draco’s gift to him was an ancient book of dark spells and curses, which he smiled over. Phoenix got him a pocket watch and fob with chain. The watch had the usual charms, but it also included a very strong protection spell that the girl had paid extra for. Lucius felt the strong magic, and smiled gratefully at the girl, pleased

that she was worried enough to try to keep them safe. She was really starting to feel like family now, and the elder Malfoys couldn't have been more pleased. He kissed her also, and thanked her for the gift.

It was almost noon when they finished the gift exchange, so they headed into the dining room for lunch. Phoenix still seemed jumpy and a little pained, so their parents suggested a snowball fight in the garden. Everyone dressed warm and headed outside. Draco immediately formed a snowball and pelted his father with it. The man laughed at Draco's poor aim, as the snowball sailed harmlessly over his head. Phoenix's aim, however, was quite deadly, and most of her throws made their targets. The kids took to hiding and pelting the others as they passed the hiding places, so the elder Malfoys cast repello charms to cause the missiles to return to the launchers. More often than not, the children ended up getting their own snowballs back in their faces, and soon enough, the games were called because both children were soaked and chilled to the bone. Everyone trooped back into the Manor, stripped off all the wet outer clothes, and cuddled up next to the roaring fire in the family room, sipping on hot chocolate the house elves promptly provided.

Phoenix leaned companionably against Draco, her eyelids drooping in exhaustion. She struggled to stay awake but, because of the nightmares the night before causing a lack of sleep, she drifted off, comforted by the warmth of the fire and the murmur of voices around her. She slowly slid sideways, ending up with her head in Draco's lap, her body curled around like a cat. He stroked her hair and sat talking with his parents about her nightmares and what could happen once they went back to school. They also discussed his sleeping arrangements with regards to the girl. They knew Draco was the only one able to keep the nightmares at bay by holding her. His presence was a comfort to the girl. However, they would have to be careful in school; should they be caught in a "compromising position" they could be expelled. The rumors would be particularly vicious, and Phoenix would have more trouble with unwelcome advances. Draco understood this, and fully intended to keep the girl's reputation protected.

"Only the core group know the password to the door, and I can have Sev put up wards around it for protection. I don't want to change the

password, so I'll have Sev put some special locking charms on the door as well, so no one can walk in unannounced." They discussed more protections as Phoenix slept on, dreamless for once, a peaceful smile on her face.

The headmaster appeared in Hagrid's floo, startling the half-giant. He quickly pulled out a chair for the old wizard, and readied tea. Dumbledore sat in the chair at the table, waiting for the tea to finish brewing, his eyes spinning with the ideas rolling through his head. After Hagrid had finished making the tea and setting out cookies, he sat at the table and waited expectantly for the old man to speak.

"We need to eliminate Mr. Malfoy. He is increasingly becoming an interference in my plans with the girl," the old man grumbled. Hagrid's eyebrows rose; he was under the impression that Potter had left. The fact that the headmaster was so distracted by things that he'd let slip this bit of information was telling. Hagrid kept silent; he didn't relish being on the receiving end of an unforgivable. Questions started forming in his mind that he knew he wanted answers to, and he knew how and who to get those answers from. The old wizard continued to speak, and the half-giant dragged himself out of his thoughts to listen.

"You need to set up an 'accident' to take the boy out. Let one of your 'pets' get him. The pet will have to die, however it is a fair sacrifice for what I need to do. I cannot have him between me and the power I need and deserve. I expect results, and I will not take failure kindly." With that warning, the headmaster flooed back to the castle, leaving a very confused mountain in his wake.

"Something doesn't seem right, Fang," the man grumbled at his dog. "He wanted Potter to save us. Suddenly, Potter is gone and the girl is in his place, looking remarkably similar to the boy. Did Potter even exist? Why does he want the girl? She's just a girl. Where is Potter? Who is Potter? I have to kill a student. I can't do that. I won't do that. Especially as the student hasn't done anything but make friends with the girl. I need to talk to Sirius. He's close to the old man. Maybe he can get information." With that, Hagrid went to his fireplace to place a fire call. The conversation was short, and Black seemed like he was on board with checking into things. He had been developing suspicions himself. Some of the Order members seemed to be doing

double duty undercover, and Black suspected that they were, in fact, Death Eaters. And if there were spies like that in the Order, Voldemort knew more than was suspected.



Severus flooded in the following day with information on the runes on the Karstjewel wand. The children were upstairs, playing Exploding Snap in Phoenix's room. Draco had slept with the girl every night since the screaming, and the nightmares were kept at bay. Their feelings for each other had been getting stronger and stronger, and the bonds wound tighter around their hearts and souls.

"Lucius," Snape began as he saw the elder Malfoy in the library, "I have information on the runes on the wand. The children need to be present. It is of utmost importance." Lucius' eyebrows rose slowly, his eyes looking troubled. He snapped his fingers, calling Jadie.

"Go get the children; tell them they need to come to the library at once."

"Yes sir," the house elf bowed. She popped away, and popped back a few moments later to tell Malfoy that the children were on their way. He thanked the elf, and she popped out. Moments later, the library doors opened, and the children entered, followed by Narcissa, who had heard the elf as she passed the bedroom door. The children took the small sofa, and the adults took the remaining chairs around the fire. Severus cleared his throat, not sure how to begin, but knowing that the information had to be shared.

"Phoenix, because your mother was a goddess, you have the power of the gods. You are not, however, a goddess. You will be able to harness the powers of the ancients to some degree. This is what makes you the most powerful witch in the last thousand years, and what makes you so...desirable to the Djinn. According to the wand, James Potter's family were incredibly powerful witches and wizards. His family is descended from Salazar Slytherin, which is why you speak Parseltongue. You are the only descendent of Slytherin on record that has been able to speak Parseltongue. You have a strong magical history, which is recorded on the wand.

"Draco, the Malfoy line is descended from Merlin himself. You are the only descendent of Merlin on record able to use elemental magic." At this revelation, the senior Malfoy promptly fell out of his chair. His mother beamed at the idea that her baby is descended from one of

the greatest wizards in history. After a suspiciously amused snort from Severus, he cleared his throat and continued.

“Oddly enough, on your mother’s side, there is a connection to Viviane, who learned under Merlin himself. She became a very powerful sorceress, and was able to pass her magical skill to you as well. This magical hierarchy between the two of you is what connects you, what makes you two halves of the same soul. You were inevitable. You were destined, and a bonding like yours occurs once a millennium.”

The kids sat looking at the adults, noting their stunned faces. Then they looked at each other and shrugged. They waited for a few moments, and when it looked like no one was going to say anything, they got up to leave. Lucius cleared his throat, stopping their progress. They turned and looked at him expectantly.

“We will start rudimentary wand magic tomorrow. I also want you to bring those Dark Arts texts I gave you. You will start studying different disciplines of magic. We need to get you as strong and as controlled as possible.” They nodded and left the library.

“They don’t seem too surprised at the information,” Severus said.

“I believe,” Narcissa opined, “that they don’t really understand the history behind the information they’ve been given. I must start Phoenix’s education tomorrow, and I may as well educate our son on his heritage as well.”

Upstairs, the kids were sitting on the bed, playing Exploding Snap and talking about what was just said.

Sooooo, Phoenix began, Merlin was real. And you’re related to him. Interesting.

You are related to Salazar Slytherin! How great is that!?!

I don’t know. No clue who he is.

He's one of the original four founders of Hogwarts. Didn't you read Hogwarts: A History?

Ummmm, no. Did you?

Why, yes, I did. No wonder you were sorted into Slytherin!

Well, the hat wanted to put me in Gryffindor.

No way!

Yes way. So about this Merlin stuff...

How about you? Your mother is a goddess, for crying out loud!

Yeah, not too impressed, actually. I've read about goddesses, and can't say that I'm that excited.

But you have the power of the Ancient Ones at your fingertips!

What-lightning bolt throwing, earthquakes, storms, creating life? I'm not sure any of the Ancient Ones' power is going to be all that useful. Besides, you're the one to control elemental magic. You get the storm and nature stuff.

As you said, may not be all that useful. We'll just have to see how training goes. See what we tap into as it goes along. Besides, when we reach maturity, we gain our full powers. Might be interesting to see what happens then.

Yeah, maybe. When are you going to teach me to fly?

I'll have to ask if the wards are fixed. Maybe this weekend.

The chatter stopped for a while as they concentrated on the game. Their hands kept brushing as they took cards, or discarded cards, or just played with the cards. Phoenix looked up at the boy during one play, and seeing some of his hair had fallen across his silver eyes, reached up to stroke the strands out of the way. He looked at her, surprise in his gaze, and smiled shyly. She stroked her fingers down

his cheek, then started to lean across to him. He leaned forward and their lips met briefly before they pulled back, both faces pink.

I'm going to have to find some muggle playing cards. I have some card games I could teach you. Ever play poker?

What is Poke Her? Laughter met this question.

No, no. Poker. It's a muggle card game that involves betting money on who has the best hand. It has very many different variations. There's gin, rummy, go fish, old maid, war, crazy eights, spades, hearts, blackjack.....

Ok, ok. Those card games definitely sound a little more interesting than playing Exploding Snap all the time. Maybe we can go shopping for a little while after lessons tomorrow.

Sounds like a plan.....

"To cast a perfect curse, you must have the emotion behind it. Be it hatred, anger, jealousy, rage, love. Any strong emotion will power a curse. The strong negative emotions work best for curses that require a great deal of power to cast. Usually, when faced with a situation where a curse is required, negative emotions are present. However, if the two of you are together in the situation, your love could very well provide the power and impetus required to cast a perfect curse.

"Allow your wand to be the guide to your emotions. As it reflects your emotions at the time of use, it would be your best gauge of what curse would be most effective. I think, for your first wand project, you must discover what color corresponds to what emotion. We will try to set up situations where strong emotions would be required to use a specific curse. Watch the wand; see what color emits from it when you feel a specific emotion. We know that black is what is reflected from the wand when rage is present, from the Charms class. We also know peace is the soft sapphire blue, from the same class. We need to know what envy, anger, love, jealousy, hatred would reflect. We will set something up in the Quiddich pitch for you to have practices for using your wand.

“One of the best protections a wand has is the Patronus charm. You are far too young to learn that but knowledge of it would be appropriate right now. To use a Patronus, you must find very positive emotions. Happiness and joy usually power a Patronus, and most gain this happiness and joy from cherished memories. It is especially effective in chasing away beings that evince negative emotions like sorrow, sadness, depression, fear. Dementors are such beings, and they live off of the negative emotions their presence encourages. The happiness and joy that power the Patronus are fatal to the Dementor, should it be exposed to these emotions for an extended period of time. Thusly, this charm effectively banishes the Dementors.

“Now,” Lucius moved to the Dark Arts texts, “Dark Arts are disciplines that teach curses, charms and offensive magics, as well as potions. Dark Arts are an extension of Dark magic; however, they are not the same thing. Dark magic is completely immersed in the negative emotions, and negative behaviors of wizards and witches. Dark magic is used offensively. Nearly all of the Dark magics are illegal, and most are unpleasant and ugly. Dark Arts take from Dark magic, but not exclusively. Many of the Dark Arts spells are legal, albeit barely, and many are used defensively. Many protection spells and defensive spells are Dark Arts related. You will have a class in Hogwarts that will teach you defense against Dark Arts. To better understand the class, and to succeed in this class, I feel you should have a rudimentary knowledge and skill in the Dark Arts. I am not expecting you to become a Dark Witch or Wizard. I am, however, expecting you to have some skill in these disciplines so that, should you be confronted by someone who actually uses Dark magic, you will be able to defend yourself, as well as launch offensive spells. No situation is black or white; the world is filled with shades of grey. Therefore, you must be disciplined and educated in shades of grey. Never, for one moment, believe that you are evil or criminal for using Dark Arts. Evilness is not in what you do or how you relate to your world; evilness is in the heart and soul. I want you to study the first three chapters of Dark Arts Through the Ages and write me a three foot essay on the history of the unforgivable curses. I want it to cover how they came to be, why they came to be, and when, if ever, they would be acceptable to use. I also want your opinion, at the end of the essay, on whether or not using these curses somehow changes the fundamental soul of the person using it. That will be all.”

The kids rose from the settee they were perched in, heaving sighs of relief. They looked at each other and grinned; Narcissa had promised to take them to muggle London so they could pick up some muggle games that Phoenix was familiar with. They ran out of the library in search of her, and nearly bowled her over in the front hall.

“Mother, may we go now? Our lessons are done for today.” Draco stated simply. She nodded, then looked at the girl.

“When we are finished with shopping, I need to go over manners and etiquette with you. Then, you and Draco will meet me in the library, where we will discuss some of the history of your ancestry.” At this news, both children rolled their eyes and groaned.

We’re never gonna get to have any fun! Phoenix whined.

Yes we will. We just have to work first. There are things we must know to defend ourselves, and there are things YOU must know to survive in the high society you’ve been thrust into. The raven-haired girl stuck her tongue out at Draco. He grinned at her and took her hand. Narcissa held out a nametag. Phoenix looked at it and quirked an eyebrow at the woman.

“This is a portkey. It is instantaneous travel. You place your finger on it, and I say the spell, and we’re taken where we’re supposed to go.” Phoenix put her finger on it, as did Draco, and Narcissa whispered “Portus”, which resulted in a tugging sensation behind the girl’s navel. A few spins later and she found herself standing in the alley outside the Leaky Cauldron, feeling like she’d pass out. She staggered, and Draco quickly grabbed her arm to steady her. She shook her head briskly to clear it, and took the boy’s hand.

The trio walked a short way down the street, where Narcissa flagged a cab that took them to Hamley’s. Since Phoenix had never been in a toy store before, her eyes widened alarmingly at the selection of toys and playthings scattered about the store. Stuffed animals galore, trains, toy cars, bicycles, balls, hula-hoops, sporting equipment, dolls, dolls, dolls, and games. Things she had never owned, or looked at, or

played with. She wandered the aisles in a daze, looking at all the dolls and stuffed animals. Narcissa noticed the almost covetous look at some of the toys, and told Draco to pick out some dolls and stuffed animals for the girl, while Phoenix went to the games aisle to pick out some games. She grabbed a couple decks of cards, Monopoly and Scrabble.

Hey Phoenix?

Yeah?

What's your favorite animal?

You mean besides snakes? I love black panthers, tigers, most of the big cats. Unicorns.

You're not much of a real girly girl, are you?

Should I be offended by that question? No, not really. Why all these questions?

No reason. Just curious.

Draco picked up a panther, a tiger, and a snow leopard, as well as a unicorn. He looked at the dolls for a moment, passing over the baby dolls, the princess dolls, and the Barbie dolls. He found, sitting almost neglected behind a bunch of rag dolls, a doll dressed all in black. It, too, was a rag doll, with a white face. The lips were black, and it had stitched eyelashes. It looked like the bride of Frankenstein, with scars stitched on its face, around its neck and up one arm. It wore fishnets, and held a hangman's noose in its hand. Draco smirked in amusement, thinking that the doll would be perfect. He grabbed it, and met his mother at the counter while Phoenix was still browsing. Narcissa quickly paid for the toys and shrunk them before the girl got there. She soon arrived with her selection of games, Narcissa paid, and they went by cab back to the Leaky Cauldron.

Sirius came out of the Cauldron just as the group exited the cab. He stopped and stared at his cousin for a moment, then darted forward

and gave the tall, statuesque blonde a fierce hug. Startled, her eyes widened for a fraction before she embraced him back. He pulled back and looked at Draco for a moment, then put his big paw on top of the boy's head, ruffling his hair. Draco's hands flew to his own head in panic, frantically smoothing down the golden locks.

That's my HAIR! Phoenix heard him screech in her head. She laughed out loud, emerald eyes twinkling. The laughter caught the man's attention, and he turned his piercing blue eyes on her. He looked at her for a moment, then reached out to touch her. She backpedaled quickly, panic rising in the green orbs. Draco instantly stepped between Sirius and the girl, his hand on the man's chest, gently pushing him back.

"No one touches her," he said calmly. Sirius' eyebrows rose in surprise, and he put his hand back to his side. He then turned to the Malfoy matriarch and grabbed her elbow, gently leading her into the Cauldron. The kids looked at each other for a moment, then followed. They spied the pair heading for a booth at the back of the tavern, and slowly made their way to it, Phoenix dodging the bodies, and Draco running interference. More than once, a lecherous wizard would reach out to the lovely child, but Draco' snarls and death sneers always gave pause. The children finally made the booth, none the worse for wear, and sat just as they heard Sirius speak.

"Narcissa, it's so good to see you. I really need to speak to you and Lucius. I have information about this child," indicating Phoenix, whose eyes widened in fear, "that I think you should know. There are things going on in the Order that don't make sense, and I've been hearing rumors and stories that contradict each other. Dumbledore spends too much time talking about Potter in the meetings, and I also doubt the existence of Voldemort. We've seen and heard the Death Eater reports, but I've yet to see any evidence of the Dark Lord. I will meet with you and Lucius at the Manor this Saturday. We will talk more then."

Just then, a group of men entered the Cauldron. Sirius' eyes widened, and he made a scowling face. He immediately got up from the booth and went to the men at the door. There were furious murmurings, and a couple of shouted curses. Sirius glanced back at the family for one



brief second, then left with the group. Narcissa sat for a moment longer, then grabbed the kids' hands and took them outside and around the corner, where they apparated directly into the Manor's front hall.

"I just ran into cousin Sirius," Narcissa drawled to her husband and Severus, who was visiting. "He has information on the Order, and information on Phoenix. He will be here on Saturday to fill us in." Narcissa looked at the kids for a moment, telling them that lessons would be postponed until later. Lucius nodded at his wife, and the adults walked down the hallway to the library. The kids ran upstairs with the resized games, Draco anxious to learn about some of the muggle toys.

Once they got to the room, Draco pulled the toys from the bags. Phoenix's eyes got bigger as she saw the stuffed animals, and a huge grin graced her face at the rag doll.

When did you do this? WHY did you do this?

We saw your face light up when you went in the store. We surmised that you didn't have toys of your own, and I thought you might like some stuffed animals, since you are obviously too old for blocks and erector sets.

Actually, I wouldn't mind erector sets.....Thank you. All my favorites. And I LOVE the doll!

Yes, well, you really, really didn't seem the type for baby dolls and Barbies. I have a special stuffed creature I would like to give you, if you'll have him.

I'd love him. Draco grinned and ran to his room, rummaging around in his closet until he found what he was looking for. Dashing back to the girl's room, he slowly walked in and shyly handed her what he was holding behind his back. It was a very large stuffed dragon, black with silver eyes. The wings were substantial, and green. It roared and puffed smoke, grinning up at the girl as she cuddled it.

I love him, Dray. She slowly walked forward and pressed a gentle kiss on the boy's lips. He blushed beautifully and dropped his eyes, smiling. Phoenix grabbed a deck of cards and unwrapped them, smiling wickedly.

"The first game we'll learn is poker," she declared. "Prepare to lose your money, Malfoy."

Saturday came all too quickly. The wards around the Manor were strengthened against the non-corporeal and lost souls, so it was safe for the kids to go out to the Quidditch pitch and fly. Phoenix's first journey on a broom was very shaky. She understood the mechanics of hanging on, steering with her hands and body, much like steering a sled or bicycle, but she was wobbly when it came to actual flight and hovering. She never strayed higher than a couple of feet off the ground, and Draco remained at her side the whole time. Her nerves eventually calmed down, and she was able to learn to stabilize herself in the air. After about two hours, she decided she was done, and sat in the stands, watching as Draco performed more aerobatics. He was poetry in motion, and she got a thrill watching his grace and form in the air. All too soon, a house elf popped up to remind the children of lunch. Draco landed next to her, and they put their brooms away and walked to the house.

On entering the house, they heard voices coming from the library. As they passed the door on their way to the dining room, they heard the name Harry Potter, and stopped outside the open door, listening.

"Dumbledore has told us that Harry Potter was sent to the Americas to learn to fight," Sirius began. "We've been hearing rumors, however, that a girl seems to have taken his place. There are also wild stories going around that Potter was killed, and Dumbledore is trying to cover it up. If Potter is dead, how are we going to survive the coming war? Who's going to fight Voldemort for us? Did you kill Potter? That's what most of the rumors are hinting at; you killed Potter, and are joining the Dark Lord as a Death Eater." Before Lucius could speak, the girl's voice spoke up from the doorway.

"Harry Potter is not dead," she said. She and Draco entered the room, and her eyes met Lucius'. There was an unspoken signal in that

glance, and she nodded. "I am Harry Potter. Or, at least, I was. The stories about a Dark Lord killing my parents and giving me the lightning bolt scar are false. I'm sure, if the Malfoys trust you, they will fill you in on my family history. Dumbledore wants my power, and he is seeking any way he can to isolate me, keep me submissive and obedient. He knew of my past, and my gender, from birth. He is manipulating the wizarding world for his own agenda. I'm sure if you investigate you will find evidence of this deception." Draco grabbed her hand, and the children sat in their settee. Sirius pondered the information and the child for a few moments. She looked back with clear, speculative green eyes.

"We can't fight Dumbledore right now. He is far too powerful and has too many magical beings behind him," Lucius said. "We need to keep him under control somehow. Keep watch on him. Keep the dangling of this girl's power and promise in front of him like a carrot on a stick. We are working on training and strengthening both her and Draco for the coming battle. We are in a war; unfortunately, our enemy is most revered and trusted. We have to dispel the myth of Potter, and to do that, we need to eradicate the trust and faith the wizarding world has in him. We cannot do that until the children come into their full power, and are trained to use it.

"We have...another problem, however. The "relatives" she was left with aren't hers. They are being paid by Dumbledore to keep her. She participated in a pre-commitment bonding ceremony to my son, which is binding, and will keep her away from the muggles. Unfortunately, because of the history between her and the muggle man, he may not want to let her go. We need to eliminate him. We cannot Obliviate him; the history is too deeply ingrained within him as well as his family. I do not wish to suggest murder, but in this case we have no choice. I need you, Sirius, to contact Lupin. He needs to come here, so we can explain matters to him. I believe he may be able to provide a solution that would be permanent, without dragging us into the spotlight. The quicker we eliminate these muggles from her life, the more time we will be able to devote to training and the eventual downfall of the headmaster. I want it done for personal reasons as well. I want her to feel safe, and as long as those muggles are out there, she will never feel safe." Sirius nodded once, and stalked to the

door. Lucius looked at Phoenix, and saw gratitude reflected in those green orbs. He smiled; now she will know that she is ours, and safe.

A/N: Just to clear up a question by a reviewer....Phoenix speaks Parseltongue because she's a descendent of Salazar Slytherin. She's been the only descendent of Slytherin to speak the language.

---

---

The return back to the train station was uneventful. However, the arrival wasn't. The car pulled up out in front of the station, and everyone piled out. Well, the kids piled out. The adults gracefully exited (Malfoys don't pile out), and everyone looked around at the busy station. Phoenix's eyes widened as she saw the pigman and his family, hovering near the entrance to King's Cross. The Christmas decorations were still up, and garland trailed down over the heads of the Dursleys as they stood near the archway. Vernon kept batting at the tail end of the garland, which was twirling and drifting lazily in the breezes created by the crowds and the trains. With a snarl, he yanked the offending piece of decoration down, attracting the attention of everyone at the station, as well as a couple of officers. His eyes lit on his prize, and, face purpled in rage, he stalked toward the trembling girl, his hand reaching for her. Before he could make contact, the two officers stepped in front of him, halting his forward progress.

Narcissa glanced at the officers, then did a quick double take. She saw Dolohov and Greyback, two good friends of the Malfoys. Their eyes were dark and dangerous, and they looked ready to kill.

"What seems to be the problem here?" Greyback snarled. Dursley flinched at the sound of the voice, which was like boulders grinding together. He stepped back a pace and pointed at the girl.

"She's mine. These people have taken her. She belongs to me." He again attempted to step past the officers and grab the girl, but Dolohov grabbed his arm, pushing him back. He stumbled, but maintained his footing and glared at the interfering officers. "Well, aren't you going to arrest them? They took what's mine. I want her back." Turning to the Malfoys, Dolohov, with a glint in his eye, addressed Lucius.

“Is this true? Does this child belong to this...man?” The contempt audible in the voice made Dursley flush darker, his rage reaching its pinnacle. Lucius smirked and shook his head.

“She is a Malfoy. If you do a test, you will find that she is a Malfoy.” Dursley’s mouth opened and closed, his rage so complete that he was struck dumb. Finally, he found his voice.

“SHE’S MINE!” he roared. “I WANT HER BACK NOW!” By this time a curious crowd had gathered, listening. Petunia, her face red with embarrassment and humiliation, tried valiantly to pull herself and Dudley into the nearest wall. They cowered in a corner, away from the attention, and watched in horror as Vernon tried to reclaim the thing that had come between him and the rest of his family. Tears made their way slowly down her face as she watched her husband fight for the slutty freak, knowing in her heart that she had truly lost him.

Dursley again attempted to grab the girl, and it was Greyback this time who grabbed the man around the throat. Dursley looked into Fenrir’s eyes, and saw murder there. He started to shiver and quake as he felt the claws on the wolf’s hand digging into his tender throat.

“You’ve been told, sir, that she is a Malfoy. She is part of a well-respected and well-connected family. If you choose to press the issue, I am sure that you will come to regret it.” In his fury, Dursley failed to catch the clear warning in Greyback’s voice. He tore himself from the wolf’s grip, leaving shallow scratches on his throat, and bellowed his rage.

“YOU WILL NOT KEEP ME FROM WHAT’S MINE! THAT OLD MAN PROMISED THAT SHE WAS MINE!” Phoenix was shivering in Draco’s arms, praying to everything she could that the nightmare would stop. There’s no way out. He’ll never leave me alone. I can’t do this. I can’t do this. O god o god o god o god o god... Draco heard the mental babbling, and hugged the girl tighter to his chest. His eyes met his father’s and saw understanding there. Lucius stepped forward to put a stop to the ruckus.

"I wish to press formal charges against this man," he said, "for harassing my daughter. His presence is causing great emotional anguish for her." Dolohov nodded, and both he and Greyback grabbed Dursley. Greyback yanked Dursley's fat arms around his back and clamped handcuffs around his wrists, so tight that they cut off circulation to his hands. Vernon bellowed his rage again and attempted to struggle, not feeling the tip of a wand against his ribs. Dolohov cast a silent Imperio and Dursley instantly became docile. They walked him down the sidewalk and around a corner into an alley, Petunia and Dudley following a few steps behind. Once in the alley, away from prying eyes, Greyback grabbed Petunia and her child, and all parties apparated to another location, from which the Dursleys never returned. There was a short article in the papers a few days later about finding the house burnt down, and the entire family dead inside, not much remaining but scattered bones. There was no speculation on the deep gashes found in the skulls of the remains; everyone just figured something fell on them as they died.

It took several long moments of Draco caressing Phoenix's back, her hair, her cheeks, before she calmed down enough to look at him. He assured her that Dursley was gone, showing her his lack of presence, stroking his fingers down her cheek. She looked deeply into his silver eyes, love and trust shining from her emerald ones, and kissed his lips gently. She smiled at him, and turned to their parents to give them reassuring hugs and kisses goodbye. She then grabbed Draco's hand, who still looked stunned from the kiss, and dragged him to the pillar to get to Hogwarts Express. Lucius and Narcissa watched them leave, concern and worry flitting across their features, for they knew that the nightmare was far from over. The Dursleys may be gone, but her memories weren't.

On board the train, the kids finally found a quiet empty car. They had just settled in when Granger opened the door and poked her head in. She looked at Draco and Phoenix for a moment, then slid into the car and sat on the bench opposite. She continued to give them measured looks, and Phoenix began to squirm, uncomfortable at the appraisal. She scooted closer to Draco, practically crawling into his lap in her desire to feel safe. Draco wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her closer, his other hand entwined with hers. Draco considered the

other girl for a few moments, trying to calm Phoenix's panicked voice in his head.

Calm down, love. Let's see what she wants. She won't stay.

"I don't believe you. And I'll tell you why I don't believe you. I've heard...things...about your family that make me believe you're part of Voldemort's inner circle. I believe you killed Harry Potter, and I believe this girl is the slutty tramp that Ron Weasley has said she is. As soon as we get back to Hogwarts, I'm going to talk to the headmaster about the stories you're trying to spread." Granger started to rise, and Draco grabbed her arm and pushed her back into her seat, his rage roiling in his mercury orbs.

"You will sit and listen. What you are being fed is lies, by people who are under Dumbledore's control. You just can't..." A hand on Draco's arm silenced him, and he glanced over at the raven-haired girl, his eyes meeting her green ones. The green had darkened in rage, and she raised an eyebrow in silent signal. He nodded and sat back, clenching his jaw in fury. For the first time, she spoke to Granger.

"I don't care that you don't believe us. But I will not have you besmirching the character of the only family that has ever cared about me." Her magic lashed out and pinned the girl to the seat, and memories were thrust, unwelcome, into the other girl's head. Phoenix did nothing to stop the flow, knowing that this may have been the only way to make the girl understand. Draco wanted her on their side, and for him, she would suspend her mistrust and try to make the girl understand.

Granger's eyes widened as the memories assaulted her. Every aspect of the abuse, every nasty conversation was thrust into the girl's head. Confirmation of Dumbledore's complicity in keeping the girl under the abuse was heard. Confrontations were seen. When all the information was finally transferred and assimilated, Granger slumped in her seat, exhausted and stunned at the revelations. Her eyes widened as she remembered the overheard conversations of Weasley's, and his justifications for stalking the girl.



She looked at the pair across from her for a moment longer, then got up and left. Draco watched the bushy-haired girl leave, concerned, and looked at the girl next to him. She shook her head and settled back against the seat.

What happened? I felt your magic flow out. What did you do?

You wanted her to understand. The only way she would understand, or could understand, is if she saw. So I showed her.

Everything?!?

Yes, everything. I needed her to know how your family saved my life. I needed her to know who was responsible for the damage in my life. And I needed her to know how much I love you and your family. But most of all, I needed her to know who I really am.

Draco leaned over and kissed the girl's cheek. She smiled at him, and stroked her fingers down his face. Whatever Granger thought or believed, it was in her hands now. Phoenix knew, one way or another, that the bushy-haired know-it-all would be more aware of what was going on around her. That she would be able to really see what was going on. Even if she never decided to support the Malfoys, or even if she never took up a battle sword to fight against Dumbledore, she would at least not be a pawn in the game. Ally or not, Granger would at least be independent of influence. The emerald-eyed girl communicated this silently to her silver-eyed Slytherin, and he nodded in agreement. He knew that he pushed for some kind of alliance with the intelligent Gryffindor, and he knew that his raven-haired beauty was reluctant to let anyone else into the inner circle. He wanted an objective observer; someone who could fly under Dumbledore's radar, keep to the shadows and stay safe. He knew the brainiac would be a strong ally. Now it was up to her, whether she wanted to fight alongside them or not.

The train ride was uneventful. Phoenix and Draco sent Hedwig ahead with a message for the gang, then curled up on the bench in the empty car, enjoying each others' company. Eventually, the girl slumped against the blonde, exhaustion from the trying day taking its toll. She slid down further, laying her head in his lap, and fell asleep,

his hand holding hers, thumb caressing her knuckles. Her face wore the soft, smiling expression of someone at peace, and Draco was proud and humbled that he was able to make her feel that way.

They finally reached Hogsmeade station and looked out the car windows. There, standing on the platform, were the Slytherins. The entire first year class was waiting for them, escorted by the Prefects. Phoenix's heart lifted in gratitude at the show of support she was getting from her house. Severus was also there, standing in the background, trying to be inconspicuous. She turned to Draco, joy shining in her eyes, bouncing excitedly. Draco smiled back and took her hand, leading her out of the car and off the train. The class gathered around the pair, with Pansy, Blaise, Vince, Greg and Millie creating the comforting circle that they always formed. The kids chattered away, recounting their vacations, and presents received. Both Phoenix and Draco showed their promise rings at the same time, identical smirks gracing their faces. Everyone oohed and aahed and were suitably impressed with the rings. Upon reaching Hogwarts, they found the headmaster at the top of the steps to the Entrance Hall, waiting patiently.

"Ms. Evans, may I have a word?"

"Of course, Headmaster," she replied. "Severus, would you please accompany me?" Severus bowed and acquiesced. The headmaster frowned furiously.

"Ms. Evans, I really need to speak to you alone."

"I'm sorry, Headmaster, but I must insist that Severus accompany me. I do not feel it is in my best interest to see you alone." The Headmaster's eyes widened, and fury darkened his face.

"Very well. This way, please." The pair followed Dumbledore to his office, feeling the palpable rage rolling from the man.

Draco, I'll try to let you know what's going on. I'll see if I can open our connection enough for you to hear the conversation. He's really mad, and I don't know what'll happen.

Don't worry. Sev is with you. He won't let anything happen. I'm going to hang around the entrance to the office anyway, just in case. What's the password?

M&Ms.

Is that some kind of bondage term?

No, it's muggle candy. Little chocolate candies, covered in a hard shell.

Really? Chocolate? I LOVE chocolate! Phoenix smiled, Draco's enthusiasm for candy helping to dispel her uneasiness. She and Severus sat in the chairs in front of the desk and waited for Dumbledore to begin.

"Ms. Potter, it has come to my attention that you did not return to the Dursleys for the holidays. Care to tell me where you went?"

"No." Dumbledore's face reddened, his blue eyes sparking with fury.

"Did you spend the holidays with someone else?"

"That is none of your concern."

"It is my concern. If you don't spend time with the Dursleys, the protections provided you will fail. I only want your safety."

"If you wanted my safety, why did you put me with that pedophile?" Dumbledore recoiled as if slapped, desire warring with rage in his eyes. Rage won out.

"My dear, I don't know what you're talking about. The Dursleys are a fine, upstanding family, who love you deeply. I'm sure you're just exaggerating your mistreatment. You will return to the Dursleys at the end of the school year. You will have no choice."

"Oh, but I do have a choice. I am no longer pigman's plaything," she began, her voice trembling with righteous anger. Severus reached over and touched her hand in warning, cautioning her on revealing

too much. She reined in her temper with great difficulty and began again. "I don't have to go to the Dursleys anymore. I have found a safe haven, and there's nothing you can do about it. If that will be all..." Dumbledore stared at the girl, stunned and confused. How have I lost so much control in such a short time? he wondered to himself. I have got to find a way to get her back under my thumb. I need to get her away from Slytherin, and in with Weasley and Granger. I can demand a resort, but not until the next school year. How do I get her back into Dursley's house?

Phoenix had risen, preparing to leave. The headmaster's eyes snapped to the girl, and he glared. She looked back at him, eyebrows raised, and Severus looked a little alarmed at the fire in Dumbledore's eyes.

"I have not yet dismissed you, Ms. Potter. This needs to be resolved. You are going back to the Dursleys. You will die if you do not."

"Is that a threat, Headmaster?" Phoenix queried dangerously. "I don't take kindly to threats. You cannot make me return there. You have no say or authority in my life. I'm finished here." With that, she turned and exited the office, Severus hurrying behind her. The rage boiling in the office was felt by most of the staff, and they looked around for the source of the sudden spike in dangerous magic.

A few days later, Hedwig flew into the Great Hall at breakfast, carrying what looked like a newspaper in her claws. She landed next to Draco's plate, and he took the paper from her, giving her a piece of bacon. She chewed on it while Draco opened the paper. It was a muggle newspaper, called The London Times, and the front page was covered with a banner headline about a random house fire in Surrey. Draco read the article, with Phoenix looking at it over his shoulder. He grinned widely, and held the paper up toward the teachers' table, showing the headline to Dumbledore. He then handed the paper to Hedwig, instructing her to drop it on the headmaster. She did so, and flew from the Hall before retaliation could be handed out. Dumbledore picked up the paper and read the article, his face getting darker and darker with impotent fury. He threw the paper down and stormed away, shocking the teachers surrounding him. They looked at the paper, wondering why a muggle

newspaper would affect him thusly. Only Snape knew for sure, and he smirked as one avenue of Dumbledore's control was slammed shut. I'm going to have a talk with Lucius, he thought, allowing a grin to grace his face. Many students in the Hall saw the grin, and quaked visibly. It looked sinister, and promised to be no good for anyone.

The Hall cleared as the students made their way to their classes. The chatter was particularly loud as the children discussed the headmaster's strange behavior. Potions, the first class for Slytherin and Gryffindor first years, was especially loud, until Snape walked in. Silence reigned as every student watched the Potions professor, fearful of what the smile at breakfast could mean. No student felt safe; even the Slytherin first years were afraid and they usually had nothing to fear from their head of house. But Snape's smile at breakfast signaled an almost jubilant mood, and the potions class went swimmingly, except when Weasley blew up his cauldron. Even then, Snape only cautioned the red-head and took five house points. Phoenix and Draco were overjoyed that the headmaster couldn't force her to return to the Dursleys. For the first time, the girl actually felt truly free, as if she'd been liberated from some prison. She would never have to see pigman or lady pigman or pigman junior anymore. No more surprises. No more threats. No more unexpected appearances. And no more attempts to control her. She was FREE.

Lunch was an exuberant affair as all of the Slytherin family celebrated Phoenix's freedom. There was laughter, jokes, and hugs and affection all around. The other tables just stared at the display of camaraderie and joy. What made lunch even better was the fact that Dumbledore's presence was lacking. Without him glowering over the Hall, everyone felt more relaxed, and the joyous mood from the Slytherins became contagious, spreading all over the Hall.

Hedwig flew in again during lunch, bringing a letter from the Malfoys.

Draco

Severus has told us of the conversation with Dumbledore, and his subsequent reaction to the deaths of the Dursleys. Please assure Phoenix that we will do whatever is necessary to protect her and keep her safe. Our mutual friends are keeping an eye on the

headmaster, and keeping tabs on his Order. We have some well-placed people in his organization, and will continue to work to expose his treachery and lies. Keep an eye on your lovely intended, and don't allow her to be in the headmaster's company alone. She is not safe there.

With great love

Narcissa and Lucius

Draco read the letter twice, then used a simple charm to make the missive disappear. Phoenix, in conversation with Pansy, never noticed the letter, and Draco wasn't sure if he should tell her. Despite the fact that the Dursleys had abused her and tortured her, he was sure that she would not take the news of their murders very well. She had finally started to sleep without nightmares (albeit with him lying in the bed with her, cuddling her all night), and he didn't want to reactivate them. He was sure that if she had found out about the murders, and the fact that the murders were committed for her, the guilt would practically eat her alive. Hate them or not, she was human enough, with a conscience, to feel bad for anything that happens to people because of her. He did not want to inflict that guilt, and worked very hard to marshal his thoughts so she could never find out.

A/N: The song is Holding on to My Pain by Thunderstone

---

Days go by

And I'm holding on to my pain

Keeping my eyes away

From what makes me weak, fragile, and slow

As the days wound by, the pain and anguish of Phoenix's past started to catch up with her. In unexpected moments, a memory would flare up, causing the girl to flinch and pale. Colors would spark memories; motions would spark memories; faces would spark memories. All too soon, the sparkling green of her eyes started to dull. She kept her head down, not looking at anything or anyone. The connection of the bond hummed like so much dead air. Draco could feel her in there, in his mind and soul, but he couldn't hear her. As if she had completely shut her mind off. He would get uncomfortable and nauseating flashes of memory from her, but the pain and terror were kept away.

Several weeks went by, and the girl was fading into a shell of herself. The freedom from the Dursleys seemed to have broken the barrier in her mind that kept all the emotion at bay. The Slytherins watched with great sadness as the girl slowly crumbled before their eyes. Draco was becoming desperate as the girl he loved withered away. In desperation, he went to Severus.

"Uncle Sev, I don't know how to help her."

"I spoke with Lucius. He has a mind healer available, and wishes you to take Phoenix home for a month. Dumbledore has been unavailable, and so I spoke with deputy headmistress McGonagall about the girl. I did not go into detail, but I did give her the basic understanding of the trauma the girl suffered. She is willing to allow both you and Phoenix leave for a month so the girl can get better. McGonagall will forward all of your class assignments by owl so neither of you will fall behind.

Take her home, Draco. Help her get better. Do not allow Dumbledore to win so easily.” Draco nodded and went back to the common room. There, he spoke to his Slytherin brethren.

“Phoenix and I are going home for the next month. You have a pretty good idea of what has happened to her, and apparently it is getting the better of her right now. My father has help waiting, so I need to get her home so she can start to heal. Please feel free to come to the Manor on the weekends and visit. I know she would love to see all of you there.” The blonde grabbed each one of his friends in a hug before going to the room he shared with the raven-haired girl. He stepped inside to see her curled up on the bottom bunk, her green eyes almost dead. She barely moved when he entered the room, and didn’t even look up when he kissed her cold cheek. He stroked his fingers down her face for a moment, trying to push all the love he had for her through the bond. She closed her eyes, pleasure briefly ghosting her face. She remained like that, and he wandered around the room, packing their trunks for the trip home.

“Father has someone home who is going to help you,” he started to say. For the first time in weeks, Phoenix spoke, her voice dead and emotionless.

“No one can help me. I am worthless. I am useless. I am nothing.” The words, spoken with no inflection, terrified the boy. He looked at her, overwhelming sadness in his silver eyes. He quickly finished packing and summoned Greg.

“Go get Snape. Tell him we’re ready to leave.” The Slytherin left, and Draco gently helped Phoenix out of bed. She was compliant and listless as she stood, waiting for him. Severus showed up a few moments later. He had the house elves take the trunks to the Manor, and he helped Draco take Phoenix to his office, where the children flooded to the Manor. Draco exited first and turned to wait for the girl. She stumbled out of the fireplace moments later, and the blonde caught her before she could kiss the floor. Narcissa was waiting for them, a worried frown on her face when she saw the condition of the girl. Her lifeless appearance sent shockwaves through the Malfoy matriarch, and she hurriedly helped the girl up to her room, Draco trailing behind. She gently stripped the girl, Draco turning around with



a deep blush on his face, and helped her get into her pajamas. She then tucked the emerald-eyed girl into bed, giving her a kiss on her cold forehead. Narcissa motioned for Draco to follow, and they went downstairs to the library, where Lucius and the mind healer were waiting.

"She's home," Narcissa quietly stated. "She looks like death. I don't know how we're going to help her. I don't know if we can help her." Here she looked at the healer. "I am willing to allow you to work whatever magic you deem necessary to free her from the anguish she suffers. However, know this. Should anything happen to her, and I mean anything that will cause her even more damage, you will not survive. And your death will be exceedingly painful and messy. You will be unrecognizable to those who love you." With that pronouncement, she left the room. Lucius smirked, his eyebrows high on his forehead. He glanced sideways at the healer and had to hold in the laughter at the trembling man. Draco glanced at the healer, smiling broadly at his fear, and left the room, going back to Phoenix.

She had not moved from the position that she had been left in. Her eyes were still open and glazed, almost dead. Draco crawled into the bed behind her and curled up against her, wrapping her in his arms and cradling her against him. She sighed gently, the only reaction to the love and tenderness he showed her. He closed his eyes and concentrated, sending himself along the bond, trying to touch her mind.

I love him so much. But I am not worthy. I am tainted, used, dirty. He cannot love me. I am damaged. How can he love me? I am so ugly. He can see the filth inside; it's all over me. It's in my ugly face, on my pasty skin. It reflects from my putrid green eyes. I know he shudders at my every foul touch; he cringes every time my lips touch his; every time I look at him I see the revulsion for what I am in his eyes.

The depth of pain and self-loathing the girl felt was staggering. Draco was stunned at the revulsion he sensed from her, and tears coursed down his cheeks, the anguish of her thoughts breaking his heart. He knew that the love he felt for her was swimming through the bond; he believed that she knew the depth of his feelings for her. But his love couldn't seem to breach the tortured walls of her mind. He cried

silently as he cuddled her close, carding his fingers through her ebony locks. A sound outside the bedroom door startled him, and he quickly wiped the tears from his face. His mother and the mind healer came into the room and slowly approached the bed. Narcissa noticed the reddened eyes of her son, and her heart broke at his sorrow. The mind healer pulled up a chair and sat next to the bed, giving a cursory glance to the boy behind his patient. He then took a closer look at the girl on the bed, noting the distance in her eyes.

"Hello," his soft voice began. "My name is Healer Redwing. I am a full-blooded Cherokee Wizard and healer. I am here to try to help you cope with the memories that torture you. Your family has brought me here from the Americas to help you. You need to allow me access into your mind. I need to see in order to free you." When he got no response, he glanced up at Narcissa. She looked at him, measuring him, then nodded, granting him permission to do what he needed. He looked back at the girl and, wandlessly, murmured Agowatiha and Atvgi'a. Instantly he was transported into her mind, accessing the memories that tortured the girl. He saw the rapes from three years old; he saw the beatings by the woman; he saw the humiliations by the boy. He heard the vile words spat at the girl. He closed his eyes and began to murmur words.

"Unequa help this uyotschi adonvdo mend. Unequa initiate tsigegvwo o tanei of ataliwohisdi, adehohisdi, and uyoigvnedi from this uyotschi adonvdo. Create an atsiadodi for a renewed adonvdo." The spell implanted in her mind would work slowly over the next month to rid her of the memories. The combination of wizarding magic and Cherokee spirit medicine would work to purge the poison from her mind.

"I will have to come here four times a week to continue the purging process," he stated as he looked at Cissa. "I will do all I can to cleanse her memories, but she will also need healing circles and talk. I can only do so much." Narcissa nodded her understanding and escorted the man back downstairs to make arrangements for his visits. Draco cradled the girl in his arms, feeling along the bond to see what she was feeling.

Phoenix? Are you ok?

I'm...still here. I don't quite know what he did, but the pain has faded a little.

You know I love you, don't you?

Yes. If it seems like I don't, it's because I hear the hatred in my head. That hatred had been spewed at me for so long, it's hard to believe anything else. It's...hard for me to understand I have worth, when the people charged to protect and love me didn't think I did. The scars run deep. Maybe too deep to completely fade. I just hope you don't get tired of constantly reassuring me.

I love you. I will always love you. Nothing will ever change that. I don't care how many times I have to tell you that, how many times I have to hug and kiss the pain away, how many times I have to chase the nightmares away. I'm not going anywhere. You're stuck with me. Forever. Laughter met this proclamation.

You make it sound like a prison sentence. Or a punishment. Please, punish me. A huge yawn cracked the silence in the room. Draco smiled, stroking her cheek. She turned her head and kissed him gently on the lips, then curled up and promptly fell asleep. He blushed, thrilled to his socks that she kept sweetly kissing him. He scooted down in the bed and curled up against her back, pulling her closer and falling asleep himself.

Draco woke up slowly the next morning, rubbing his eyes sleepily. The weight of the girl was missing, and his eyes snapped open, panicked, as he quickly scanned the room. He relaxed as he heard the shower in the bathroom, and he breathed a sigh of relief. He felt a tentative peacefulness through the bond, and he relaxed even further. He got up to go to his own rooms to shower, when he heard the water turn off. Phoenix came from the bathroom, wrapped in a large fluffy towel. Draco's mouth dropped open and he blushed scarlet.

"Oh, ummm...I'm...ah...I'm just gonna....gonna go..." and he pelted from the room. Phoenix laughed delightedly and finished drying off, getting dressed in muggle jeans and a black t-shirt. She went in search of Cissy and Lucius, happy that she was home again. She

found them in the dining room, just sitting down to breakfast. She pulled up a chair and smiled at the elder Malfoys as she started piling food on her plate. Lucius looked at the girl, frowning, unsure of how she felt. He raised an eyebrow at her in question, and she sat for a moment, pondering before she answered. Draco came in, fresh from his shower and still very pinkly blushing as she began to speak.

"I feel better. It's not that the memories are blocked off; more like the intensity of them is muted somehow. I'm beginning to understand that when the magical bond blocked the memories, that was so that the bond could solidify; so that Draco and I could concentrate on our magic without interference. Now that the magical bond is solid, the block has fallen, allowing my memories to be free. I know that I couldn't hide from the abuse forever; I know that I need to deal with it. It was just that...well, when the memories were, for all intents and purposes, gone, I felt like a human being. When they came crashing back all at once, I just felt so dirty and used. Unworthy. Ashamed. And I didn't want to bring that shame to you, my family. So I guess I freaked a little. I'm sorry I made everyone worry. Now that there's going to be someone to help me deal with this the right way, I feel better. Thank you."

Lucius looked at the girl for a moment longer, then went back to eating. Narcissa smiled, but worry still clouded her eyes. Draco looked at his mother, seeing the worry, and smiled reassuringly at her. He inclined his head imperceptibly, letting his mother know that he would be keeping an eye on the girl. She smiled back, only slightly reassured.

"Phoenix," she began, "the mind healer will be here again tonight to start the therapy in earnest. What he did for you last night was only temporary and not meant to last very long. He spoke of healing circles and talk, and he will explain that in more detail tonight. He expects all of us to be there, for support. I hope you do not mind."

"No, Narc...Mother, I don't mind." The Malfoy matriarch's eyes widened and brightened in surprised pleasure at the term, and her smile grew. Lucius, listening from the other side, started and looked at the girl, stunned. "I really need all of you there. The support is so very important to me now. I need to know that what happened to me,

what I am, what I did won't chase you away. We spoke of it before, but there is so much more that you do not know about. So much more that you need to hear; that I need to tell before I can be free." She turned to Lucius and looked him in the eye. "I know this will make you uncomfortable, Father, but please...I need you." The plea in her eyes and voice hurt his soul, and all he could do was nod in response, his voice gone. She smiled brightly at him and bent her head to her plate, practically inhaling the food there.

After breakfast, the kids retired to the library, where they began that day's assignments. McGonagall, true to her word, had owed the assignments to the Manor that morning. After Hogwarts lessons were completed, Narcissa stole Phoenix away to continue her lessons on comportment, etiquette, manners, and filling in the educational gaps the girl had. The emerald-eyed girl truly enjoyed these lessons with her mother; she learned everything about being a proper lady. The child was glad for the lessons as they helped her develop the mask she could use to hide her past and pain. Only her eyes would be able to give her away, and only to those she deemed trustworthy enough to see. Once those lessons were completed, Lucius summoned her, and she and Draco continued their lessons on wand magic. The Malfoy parents worked diligently to entertain the children and keep them busy, attempting to keep the memories and nightmares at bay until the healer could get there.

The floo activating in the library alerted everyone of the healer's arrival. Jadie, the house elf, silently escorted the man into the family room, where everyone had gathered. He looked around, assessing the faces, before pulling up a chair. For the therapy session, he had made sure that the Malfoys knew that they had to sit in a healing circle, so Lucius had rearranged the furniture to suit. To the left of the healer sat Lucius, then Draco, then Phoenix, and finally Narcissa on the healer's right. The healer raised his hands and chanted, his hands glowing gold. The golden glow reached out and encompassed the circle, ribbons weaving between the participants. Ribbons of other colors appeared to entwine each person; gold ribbons spun about the healer and Draco, white ribbons twirled around the elder Malfoys. Black, deep scarlet and deep purple ribbons created a whirlwind of color around the small form of the girl, and the others gasped at the colorful dance as the ribbons wove and dove in and out of the girl.

"The gold ribbons are of light and love," the healer intoned. Draco blushed that his feelings were so plainly visible. "They show the strength and protectiveness of the person, the inherent goodness and joy of life. The white ribbons are of purity and spirit. They show the clarity of emotion, as well as the purity of spirit and soul." Here the healer hesitated. He was unsure how to proceed with the explanation of Phoenix' ribbon colors; he knew the knowledge would be painful and shocking, but he hoped it would begin the healing process for the girl. "The black ribbons are of hatred and rage. They indicate the darkest of emotions. However, because they are actually entering the girl's form, these emotions are a reflection of self-worth. All of the hatred and rage are focused inward, toward her own soul. The deep scarlet ribbons are of shame and worthlessness, and the purple are of loneliness and isolation. This child is deeply wounded. We will do this healing circle twice a week, to better gauge how well the therapy is progressing. I realize that we only have a month to work through the issues; however, should it be necessary, I hope that you could arrange to allow me more time."

"Does she not feel love?" Draco asked, puzzled and hurt at the lack of the gold ribbons.

"Yes, she does. However, the pain and rage and self-hatred bury those feelings. You must understand; the hatred and rage and pain she feels has been inflicted on her for a very long time. She has never experienced love or compassion. No one has ever cherished her. In eleven years of life, she's experienced nothing but loathing and scorn and fury. Though you now have love for her, and have surrounded her with feelings of belonging and friendship, the scars her past has inflicted on her are too deep to be erased so quickly. With your love and compassion, you will be able to break those ribbons of ugliness. It will take time, but the ribbons will change. A few months of love and safety and home will not easily erase eleven years of abuse. Our therapy sessions and healing circles will go a long way to removing the damage. But she must be able to trust, which means that you all must be willing to share yourselves. You cannot hold anything back." At their nods of understanding, he began the therapy. His first step was to withdraw the magic from the healing circle. The golden glow faded, and the ribbons disappeared.

“Phoenix, we are all here to help. We will all share a particular hurt; a pain that affected us deeply. I will begin.”

The five year old boy walks along the road. He is on a reservation; the food isn't the best, and his house is just a tarpaper shack, but he is happy. He has wide open spaces to roam, and his culture teaches him so much about nature and the world. He feels safe and comfortable. A car traveling along the road stops beside the boy. He is not taught the dangers of strangers; he is not taught about prejudice. The men in the car look at his dark skin and traditional tribal clothing and spew horrible epithets at him. The passenger door in back opens, and a hand snakes out of the car, grabbing the boy and yanking him into the car. He screams, realizing that he is in danger. A fist pounds into his face, breaking his nose and fracturing his cheekbones. His lip splits severely, and blood runs down his face. He lies limp in the arms of the man in the back seat, waiting. The car finally stops in an abandoned parking lot, the child's body tossed out of the car. The boy is doused in gasoline, and a match is thrown on his wet clothes. The sudden flare of heat and pain makes the boy scream as the car speeds from the scene. A passing man sees the flames and hears the screams. He rushes to the boy, working feverishly to extinguish the flames. He succeeds, but the boy is badly burned over most of his body and his pain is excruciating.

“I wear a glamour to cover the scars I was left with. My trust of people was severely damaged that day, and it took me many years to recover. I still have nightmares, but I am able to persevere.” Silence met his story, horror reflected on the Malfoy faces. Draco's face was white, his memories rushing to the surface.

Draco is six today. A wonderful day for a birthday party. Too bad Uncle Rodolphus can't be here. Aunt Bella is, though. She looks a little rough around the edges. Still grieving. It's only been six months since he was killed. Draco's so happy. He flies into the library, where he knows Aunt Bella went, hoping she has his birthday present. He stops suddenly at the insane glitter in her eyes. “It was you, wasn't it? You killed him!” She aims her wand at the boy and he cowers, terrified, too scared to move. She mutters “Crucio” and he falls to the floor, screaming, muscles locked. He has bitten almost through his

tongue, and blood froths from his mouth as he twitches and spasms on the floor. He is kept this way for several moments, until his mother, hearing his screams, runs to him. She knocks Bella to the floor, breaking the curse. Healers are summoned, and one is able to save Draco's tongue. Nothing can be done for Bella, though. She's too far gone in her grief and insanity, so Narcissa has no choice but to have her committed to St. Mungo's.

"I've never forgotten that day," the blonde whispers. "I loved Aunt Bella. She cast an Unforgivable at me. For no reason. No reason at all." Narcissa reached out to stroke the boy's back, trying to offer comfort from the memory. He shuddered, tears forming in his eyes, as he thought about that day. Possibly the worst day of his life. Lucius' eyes were stormy grey clouds as he clenched his teeth. He didn't want to reveal his personal horror. It was unbecoming a Malfoy to expose weakness. But he knew that Phoenix wouldn't heal unless she understood that she was not alone in pain and suffering. So, voice inflectionless and face rigid, he relived his worst memory.

Today is Lucius' proudest moment. He has finally successfully brewed a potion. Granted, it is a simple one, but for the ten year old, it is still a success. His father spent months and months beating into him the importance of brewing successful potions. Abraxas Malfoy insists his children be successful in every aspect of the magical world. To be a failure in potions is unacceptable. So Lucius runs to his father to proudly show him the potion he has just brewed. His father takes the vial and sniffs the contents. "Babbling Beverage?" he sneers cruelly before backhanding the child. "All this time teaching you, and this is the best you can come up with? You truly are useless!" Abraxas takes the snake-headed cane and beats the child senseless. He does not stop until a house elf pops in to announce a visitor. When Abraxas leaves, the house elf apparates the child to his room, where she works her magic to heal him the best she can.

"I don't know why I still have the cane. Perhaps it is to remind me of the cruelty of people put in positions of trust. Perhaps it is to remind me that I am nothing like my father, and that I will never do to my child what was done to me." Narcissa is weeping quietly by now, knowing that her own personal nightmare must now be relived. She



knows that what she has endured will be the pivotal event to help Phoenix heal.

She is twelve today. All of her friends are here for a spectacular birthday party. She invited everyone from Slytherin house to come to her home and enjoy the party. She excuses herself during the festivities to take care of some personal business. She does not know she is being followed as she goes to her bedroom to get a sweater; she is chilly. She turns around at a noise and sees some of the older Slytherin boys in her room. The noise was the door closing and locking. She backs away as they advance, looking around frantically for escape. She dashes into her bathroom and closes the door, trying to lock it, trying to protect herself. The boys use a spell to open the door and she is trapped in the small room as they advance on her. Her screams echo throughout the house as she is repeatedly raped. By the time adults have made it to her room, followed by the partygoers, she is huddled on the bathroom floor, bleeding from her vagina. She is rushed to St. Mungo's, and is told that, with the damage done to her, she would be lucky if she was ever able to conceive.

"I've always been grateful for Draco. He is my pride and joy. Deep in my heart, I'd always wanted a daughter, someone Draco could protect and mentor. And I knew I would never have that. Until you came Phoenix, I had given up my dream of having my own little girl. Please, don't pull away from us. Stay with us. We love you and want you to be free. Let us help you be free." Phoenix stared at her family, face shining with tears. All the pain and anguish they had lived through, and they survived. They lived. She could do that. And she would do that.

---

A/N: I used some Cherokee words in the chapter. Here are their translations:

Agowatiha-See

Atvgi'a-Hear

Unequa-Great Spirit

Uyotschi-broken

Adonvdo-spirit

Tsigegvwo o tanei-The Removal

Ataliwohisdi-anger

Adehohisdi-shame

Uyoigvnedi-abuse

Atsiadodi-empty vessel

The therapy was having a very positive effect on the girl. She was happier and freer, and the nightmares were lessening. It seemed as if she had finally started to come into herself, to become the person she was meant to be. Draco still spent the night with her; apparently she found she could no longer sleep without his comforting warmth and embrace, and Draco was embarrassed to admit that he couldn't, either. The love and contentment hummed constantly through the bond, and during one of the healing circles, Redwing had shown everyone that Phoenix's ribbons were more silver, gold, and a shimmery green. That last color was peace and contentment. The black was still there, as was the red, but they were faint and amorphous. The purple ribbons had completely disappeared. She had made great progress in the month spent at home, and she was restless and ready to return to school. Her Slytherin friends had visited frequently, and they had played many games while at the Manor. But they wanted her and Draco back with them, amongst friends. The healer felt that she would be able to have therapy once a week, and so, anxious and excited, she and Draco packed for the trip back to school.

As they curled up that night, Draco pondered what would happen back at Hogwarts.

What are you thinking about? Phoenix asked.

Hogwarts. What do you think will happen when we get back?

I don't know. Our friends didn't say anything major had happened. We need to find out what's going on with Granger. See if she's been keeping her ear to the ground.

Good idea. We also need to start working on gathering more allies. Maybe you could start opening up to others, allow some from the other houses in.

I feel stronger. I wouldn't mind trying to get the other houses involved. The biggest obstacle I see, and I think we'll have to wait until we're older, is trying to convince everyone that the Harry Potter myth is just that; a myth. I think we may have to wait until fifth year, when he's SUPPOSED to come back. When he doesn't, we can start to dispel

the fable and disseminate the truth. Draco nodded against her shoulder. She was getting better, and now that her head was clearer, she was turning out to be quite the cunning Slytherin. He was proud and pleased.

Daylight dawned on Sunday, to find the kids sprawled on the bed, not quite awake. Their hands automatically reached for each other, fingers dancing along bare arms. Phoenix regained her senses first and leaned up on an elbow, looking down at the beautiful golden boy next to her. A wicked smirk graced her face and she slowly slid his pajama shirt up his stomach, exposing the lovely porcelain skin beneath. She glanced at his face again, to make sure he was still asleep, and set her fingers loose on the pale flesh. The first strokes were light, almost like a lover's touch, and the boy squirmed in his sleep. Then her fingers crept to the ticklish spots along his ribs, the sides of his stomach, and his armpits, and he curled into himself, laughing. His silver eyes sprung open, and he looked at her, laughter in his eyes. She straddled him and continued to tickle, causing him to buck up against her. The peals of laughter from the both of them rolled around the room, and they didn't hear the discreet knock on the door, and it wasn't until Lucius had opened the door and cleared his throat that the kids even noticed someone was there. They jumped violently and blushed as he smirked at them.

"You need to get ready to return to school. I shall have the house elves take your trunks along to the school. Breakfast is waiting." Lucius left the kids to it, laughing softly. Phoenix looked down at the boy under her, a smile in her eyes. She leaned down and kissed him on the lips then went to take a shower. He lay there for a few moments, the warmth of her still imprinted on his skin. Getting up, he went to his room to get ready for school, a blush suffusing his face as he thought about her. I don't think I could be any more in love with her, he thought to himself, unaware he was broadcasting. Suddenly he felt such a warmth, as if he was being caressed all over and he trembled. It took him many moments to get himself under control and finish getting ready for school.

At breakfast, the elder Malfoys noticed the contentment and peace shining from the girl's eyes. Her emerald orbs fairly glowed with happiness, and the shadows that had darkened them seemed to

finally be put to rest. Narcissa looked at her husband, and their eyes locked, blue on silver, silent communication flaring between them. The tension in the room evaporated, unnoticed by the children, as the parents heaved gusty silent sighs of relief (Malfoys never show outward signs of emotion). Breakfast was a joyous affair; the kids kept up a running commentary, laughing and joking with each other and their parents. By the time it was time to leave, the kids had had their parents almost rolling on the floor with laughter. The house elves had never heard such unrestrained joy before from the Malfoys; they had always maintained the proper demeanor befitting a pureblood family.

After breakfast, Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy escorted the children to the floo, where they were to arrive at Severus' quarters. Narcissa leaned down and gave a kiss on the cheek to both children and Lucius patted Draco on the back. Phoenix looked up at them for a moment, a very serious cast to her face, then reached out and gave a bear hug to Cissa first, then Lucius. She squeezed them so tightly that they had bruises on their fair skin later, but that didn't matter; both parents squeezed back just as hard. Lucius even kissed the top of the girl's head. Draco went first, so he could catch her. Which he did, when she stumbled out of the fireplace, pin-wheeling her arms. Severus snorted at the inelegant way the girl exited, and her green eyes glared at him.

"If you're done playing, everyone is waiting for you in the common room." The kids left his office and went to their Slytherin home, opening the door and seeing everyone gathered there. Immediately her Slytherin family leapt to their feet and converged on the pair, hugging, touching and chattering. Phoenix hugged them all back very tightly, and there were more than a few surprised faces in the group. This was the first time that she'd allowed anyone more intimate contact than a hand hold. They looked at Draco, and he nodded, eyes shining and a smile wreathing his lovely face.

"I've missed you all," she began. There were tears in her eyes. "I'm so glad to be back. Thank you for being so patient and kind to me. I value your friendship so much, and I'm glad to say that I feel so much better. I need to keep the therapy up for a little while longer, but the memories no longer haunt me. I can now handle what they show me,

and I will no longer let them weaken me.” The kids went into the bedroom, lounging on the bed. Phoenix went to the walls and placed her hands on them.

Welcome, little one. I feel great peace and joy in you.

Yes, I feel so much better now.

Excellent. What may I do for you?

I would like some comfortable chairs and a couch in here. I would like places for my friends to be able to lounge. I would like more color, as well, since I feel so good.

I would love to do that for you. Thank you again for sharing your power.

You’re very welcome.

She stepped away from the walls, and moments later the room shimmered. There were comfortable, soft chairs and a thickly padded sofa in a conversation pit off to one side. The colors had faded from black to soft blues and greens. The room looked brighter and more cheerful, and the children stared around in awe as they watched the changes. The furniture took on natural, deep cherry wood tones, and the walls suddenly flared to life with pictures of the children laughing, playing, and enjoying each other. Phoenix started; she had never expected to see photographs of anything in her room, and briefly wondered where they had come from. She stepped back up to the walls again.

Yes, little one?

Where did the pictures come from?

I am able to take “snapshots” of life around Hogwarts and enchant them. These are more like framed memories of your life here, and your friends. They will never be able to leave Hogwarts, but I thought they would be something for you to look at. To cherish during your

time here. I feel that you have not had enough joy in your life, and I felt that I needed to provide a small measure while you are here.

Thank you so much. This truly means the world to me.

You're welcome, little one. Be happy.

"So?" Draco asked.

"Well, it seems Hogwarts can take events in the castle, almost like "snapshots" and make these memory pictures. They can't leave the castle, but she thought I deserved a little joy in my life. She will never know how much this means to me." There were tears in the girl's eyes as she looked at the slices of her Hogwarts life on the walls. She was excited; what kind of "pictures" would be revealed in the coming years?

Monday in the Great Hall was...confusing. Firstly, when the Slytherins entered the hall, Phoenix was out front, striding confidently to her seat, Draco firmly by her side. Their hands were intertwined, and the promise rings shone and glittered on their hands. Secondly, Phoenix was smiling at everyone. She even touched some of the other people as she passed them. Thirdly, the girl was allowing people to approach her and engage her in conversation. The atmosphere around the Hall was lighter than it had been in a long time. Dumbledore scowled from his perch at the teacher's table, his blue eyes snapping fire. He narrowed his eyes as he saw the joy and laughter that surrounded the once morose girl, and he was not pleased. Not pleased AT ALL. He stormed from the hall and went directly to his office, where he fire called Lupin.

"Remus, my boy. I need you to step up your intimidation of the Malfoys. We need some stronger, more threatening action to dissuade the friendship. Since the Dursleys have been eliminated, we need to find another suitable family to take the girl in. I need her under my control until Harry Potter returns. He is the one the girl is to be with, and I will not allow anything to stand in the way."

"I will do as you ask, Albus," Lupin replied. The fire call ended and Lupin stepped away from the fireplace and looked at Sirius.

“Harry Potter is the one that we should be concerned about,” Lupin murmured. “Yet, the headmaster seems almost obsessed with this girl. I don’t like it.” Sirius inclined his head in agreement, and the two men sat together to discuss methods of finding out exactly what was going on.

It was Wednesday before they saw Granger. The pair was in the library, doing a potions essay on the uses of Unicorn blood in potions and the consequences, when the bushy-haired Gryffindor strode in. She looked around for a moment before spying the pair and stalked up to their table. Draco and Phoenix looked up at her, and there was honest speculation in the girl’s green eyes. They regarded her for a moment, then invited her to have a seat. She plopped down into the chair and dropped her school bag at her feet. She ran her fingers through the messy tangles on her head for a moment, then blew out a gusty breath.

“I heard Dumbledore talking to Lupin outside the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. The headmaster was telling Lupin that he had information that would guarantee that the Malfoy family would abandon you, Phoenix. I also heard the headmaster tell the wolf that he had found a new family for you to stay with. I don’t know what’s going on exactly, and I don’t know what the information is that the headmaster claims to have, but Malfoy, you need to tell your parents that they need to expect something. I still don’t fully understand the old man’s interest in you, but I will fight with you if you need me. And I have friends in other houses that would be glad to help as well. Not everyone here likes the headmaster, and I suspect that he’s hurt a lot of families. You will not lack for loyal supporters.”

“Thank you, Granger,” Phoenix said. The Gryffindor’s eyes widened in surprise, and she smiled. “We could use all the help you can give us. I need you to talk to people; find out who doesn’t like Dumbledore, who’s been hurt by his manipulations. I’d like a list of names, and things they’d be really good at, if possible. I need to start formulating a battle plan. For now, we need to sit tight, wait. Potter is supposedly supposed to be back in fifth year. We’ll see then what happens, what shakes out. Keep your eyes and ears open, and try to cultivate spies in other houses. We need information; the more information we have,



the better our chances of stopping this before it gets too far.” Granger nodded, her hair bouncing around her head, and left the library.

“What do you think, Draco?”

“I think she’ll be a good ally. I think you’ve got some great ideas about building supporters from the other houses. We also need the spies. We need to find out about this family he wants to send you to. Nothing will be able to negate the pre-commitment blood bond we share, but I don’t want further complications. We need to prepare for the very real possibility that this family will be waiting for you at the end of the year. If we know who it is, we’ll be able to warn Mother and Father, so they can have some protection available for you, like they did with the Dursleys. We need to make them aware that they need to protect themselves as well. I think we should talk to Severus, about polyjuice potion, and during some of the wand training, I believe we need to have Father teach us a revealing spell so that, should someone approach us polyjuiced to be someone else, we’ll be able to reveal who it really is. I know I sound a little paranoid, but we need to be especially cautious, since the headmaster seems to be stepping up his attempts to get you back under his control.” The girl reached over and kissed his cheek, smiling and pleased that he was thinking like a soldier. He blushed pinkly, instantly negating the impression.

They finally finished their homework and left the library, hand in hand. On the way back to the dungeons, they encountered Weasley. The redhead stopped and glared at them, menace in his blue eyes.

“Something I can help you with, Weasley?” Draco asked in a calm voice. Weasley’s eyes glanced at the girl by his side before returning to Malfoy.

“Yes, Malfoy. You can leave her here and go away.” Phoenix raised her eyebrows, intrigued.

“Now why would I do that?”

“Because the headmaster wants me to have a private conversation with her.”

Draco looked down into the girl's face. "Do you want to have a private conversation with him?" She considered Weasley thoughtfully for a moment.

"No. Why would I?" Weasley snarled at this.

"Professor Dumbledore requested that I have a private discussion with you. It's very important."

"Ummmm, no. Now go away." The pair made to walk around the boy, but he reached out and grabbed the ebony-haired girl's wrist, stopping their progress. She looked down at the hand with darkening jade eyes, then back at Weasley. Before she could do anything, Draco had cast a silent Burning Hex at Weasley's hand, making him drop her wrist. He yowled in pain, shaking his blistering hand, and glared at their retreating backs. This isn't over, Malfoy, the boy thought harshly. Not by a long shot.

"Are you ok?" Draco asked.

"Yeah. No big deal. He doesn't scare me anymore. I don't think he remembers anything. He's just a bully."

"Still, he could be dangerous. He has a fanatical gleam in his eye that worries me. He may be a problem down the road."

They reached the common room, and gathered the gang in their bedroom.

"Granger contacted us in the library tonight," Draco began. He then proceeded to tell them what transpired. He also spoke of the incident with Weasley in the halls. Everyone looked at each other, concerned.

"We should probably keep our guard duties, then," Blaise said. "We can't risk leaving either of you alone. Most of our classes are together, so it shouldn't be a problem keeping you protected." Greg spoke up.

"We need to find a fair representative from this house to approach the other houses with Granger, see how many allies we can gather. I don't know that any of us would work; we didn't exactly make that

good an impression at the beginning of the year. We need to find someone who is Slytherin enough to blend in seamlessly with the other houses. Someone who could get along with Granger.” Draco nodded, impressed. He thought for a moment, then came up with a name.

“How about Theo Nott? He’s intelligent, and charming. I think he’s one of our more Slytherin dorm mates. We should ask him.” Vince went to the common room to locate the boy. He then went up to the dorm, where he found Nott lounging in his bunk.

“Draco would like to talk to you in his room downstairs,” Vince said. Nott ducked his head and crawled out of the bed. He headed down to the room, where he found some of the other Slytherins. He stepped in, cautious and a little nervous.

“Theo, welcome. We have a proposition to discuss with you, but first, we need to clear up some history.” Draco started from the beginning, going through the abuse, the meeting in Madame Malkin’s, the exposure of the lie of Harry Potter, the headmaster’s manipulations, Weasley’s attack, and Granger’s willingness to help. “We need you to get together with the Gryffindor and help create some house unity, as it were. What we’re looking for is allies from the other houses. We know from Granger that there are many students here whose parents had been manipulated or injured by Dumbledore. We know that they would be strong support when we are able to go up against the headmaster. What we need from you is to be a fair representative of Slytherin House. We need you to be our face and our voice. Can you do it?” Nott looked at everyone, stunned. He had never had someone place this much trust and faith in him before, and he was excited.

“I’m always in for a little intrigue,” he drawled with a slow smile on his face. The rest of the Slytherins grinned back. This was going to be fun. They all gathered into a circle and began to plot.

Draco was a natural leader. It was his suggestion to use the Room of Requirement for the interhouse meetings about Dumbledore, and he was the one to work out a schedule where everyone could meet. He, Vince, Greg and Blaise all worked out elaborate routes to the meetings; they had spent a lot of hours on the weekends exploring every nook and cranny the school had. Phoenix helped a lot in this area by talking to the school, asking it to provide some kind of map for the secret tunnels and passageways. Hogwarts was only too happy to oblige, and the boys, being boys, had great fun turning the explorations into games.

Hermione was able to bring several people from other houses, and Theo was a godsend for the Slytherin house. The two of them together did more for house unity than anything. Weasley kept trying to get Phoenix alone; he seemed bound and determined to play Dumbledore's lapdog to perfection. As the girl was never alone, this proved very problematic. Weasley became the girl's stalker once again, but for entirely different reasons. Finally getting fed up with her semi-permanent shadow, she turned and confronted him.

"What do you want Weasley?" she finally snarled at him. He flinched at the ferocity in her tone, but stood his ground.

"I need to talk to you. The headmaster wanted me to discuss something with you."

"Why doesn't he tell me himself?"

"He's busy."

"If it's important, he should be the one to talk to me."

"It is important, and he would talk to you but he's been called away on important Order matters." Phoenix, knowing that the Order was just a front for the attacks on muggleborn and half-bloods, clenched her teeth and balled her fists. We have to stop this. Soon.

"Fine. We can talk in this classroom. Draco will be with me. I will not talk to you without him." Weasley eyed the blonde and nodded. He knew he had no choice. They went into the classroom, and the

Weasel closed and locked the door. He put up a silencing charm to prevent anyone from overhearing and turned to the other two in the room.

“Professor Dumbledore feels that you should be watched by the Gryffindors. He feels that you’re being unduly influenced by Malfoy and the Slytherins. He doesn’t want you to be used by the Slytherins as a tool to turn everyone against him and the Light.”

“Why should he care? I’m not Harry Potter.”

“He has arranged for you to be Harry Potter’s mate. Your magic is complimentary to Harry’s and you would be a strong united front against the Dark Lord. He wants you to live with the muggles he found to replace the Dursleys. He feels you are not being afforded enough protection here as Potter’s intended.” Suddenly, Weasley reached out and grabbed Phoenix’s wrist. She felt herself spinning in a whirlwind of sparkling color, before her feet hit a solid surface. She landed hard enough to stumble, and she felt Weasley release her wrist. She looked up in time to see a cage door being closed. Looking around, she saw that she was in a basement of what looked like a residence. The cage she was in was small, nestled up against one wall. She smelled a strong, wild, animal odor. She heard commotion upstairs, and opened her mouth to scream but Weasley pointed his wand at her and muttered “Silencio.” She felt the magic curl around her throat, silencing her before she could make a sound. Weasley glared at her one more time before he went upstairs. Phoenix heard Dumbledore’s voice when he opened the cellar door, and she knew that she was in serious trouble.

Draco?

Phoenix? Oh, thank Merlin! Where are you?

I don’t know. I’m in a cage in a cellar somewhere. I can’t talk. Weasley cast a spell that I couldn’t hear. I can hear people upstairs. Dumbledore’s here.

Fuck! Fuck, fuck, fuck!

Draco, calm down. You're not helping.

You're right. She heard a deep sigh. I'll get the gang together. We'll see what we can do. Give me a couple minutes and then you can describe your surroundings.

Ok. His voice disappeared from her head, and she took those few moments to look around, marking her surroundings. Minutes later, she felt him come back.

Baby? You there?

Yeah.

Tell me what you see.

The cellar isn't damp. It's almost square in shape, with an old coal furnace in the corner. There's a coal chute next to it. No windows. There are no appliances here...no washer or dryer. The stairs up are wooden, unpainted or unvarnished. The floor is stone, as are the walls. I see manacles on chains hanging from a wall almost directly across from the cage I'm in. There's blood on the manacles, and bits of hair. The blood and hair don't look very old. The cage I'm in is about four feet by four feet by four feet. It smells like wild animal in here. There's an old blanket on the floor and the ceiling looks rather high. There was silence as Draco relayed this information to the gang. His voice came back moments later.

One of the gang has a parent in the Order. He says it sounds like you're in the cellar of number 12 Grimmauld Place. Sounds like you're in the wolf's cage. I'll owl Father; I'm sure he can contact someone in the Order to get you. Silence again fell, until the cellar door opened. Footsteps on the stairs warned the girl before his face hove into view. She looked into those predatory blue eyes, rage darkening her eyes.

She had gained an incredible amount of control over her magic through the lessons with Lucius, so she was prepared to lash out at the old man. He laughed.

“I’m so sorry, my dear,” he chuckled to her. “I have made sure that the cage is warded so you cannot use your magic. You are mine. Malfoy had no right to take what was mine.” He approached the bars, the look of predatory glee darkening. Phoenix did the only thing she could; she hawked back and spat in the headmaster’s face. He flinched violently when the spittle struck his lips and chin, a snarl of rage escaping his throat. Reaching through the bars, he struck her open-handed, the blow hard enough to make her head rock and split her lip. “Listen to me, child. You are mine, and the sooner you accept that fact, the easier it will be for you. I have no intention of taking your power right now. It is too weak. Despite the fact that you are very powerful for your age, you have not come to your full potential yet. I will wait for that time, and then your power will be mine. Until then, do try to cooperate; it will make things so much easier for you.” He ogled her one more time before he strode back up the stairs.

She stuck her tongue out to lick the blood oozing from her split lip. It stung a little, and she knew she would have a bruise on her face. But she was used to it. If Dumbledore thought physical abuse would sway her, he had another think coming. His behavior just hardened her resolve.

Draco?

Yes, love?

Dumbledore was just here.

What did he do? Did he hurt you? I’ll kill him!

He slapped me. Didn’t like me spitting in his face. Laughter met this statement.

I’ll just bet he didn’t. What did the old bastard want?

He wants my power. Same old, same old. I think he means to keep me here until the new “parents” show up.

Don’t worry. I owed Father, and he’s going to contact a friend in the Order to spring you. Let me know when all is quiet there.

Ok. I love you. A sudden burst of warmth flowed through her from the bond, and she smiled softly.

I love you, too.

By the time darkness had fallen, Phoenix had been in the cage for several grueling hours. She tried to rest by lying on the pile of ragged blankets in the corner, but they smelled. The cage wasn't very big (but then, neither was she), but she still felt cramped and crowded in it. The muffled footsteps and voices from above provided some measure of comfort; she didn't feel the oppressive weight of loneliness then. When the final voice had faded, and silence loomed, her thoughts invariably turned to nightmarish things. Though she was still attending her therapy sessions on the weekends, and had friends and family, she still had moments where her brain shut down, and the wild animal of her pain and sorrow would run loose. She was in a much better place mentally, but those thoughts, feelings were still there. Fading, but there. She was starting to sink into the pain when she remembered that she was to contact Draco when the house was empty.

Draco?

Hey, babe. I've been waiting.

No one's here. The last one left a few minutes ago.

Ok. I got the owl back from Father. He was able to contact Sirius Black, my mum's cousin. Black is going to wait until full dark and floo in. Since he's an order member, he has full access to headquarters. He's going to get you and apparate you directly to the Manor. I'll meet you there.

Good. I miss you.

Miss you, too, sweetness.

It was full dark when she heard the noises. There was a faint whooshing noise, and then the stumbling footsteps. The cellar only



had one lit sconce and the shadows were very deep and frightening. She nervously chewed her lip, waiting for whoever it was. The cellar door screamed as it opened, and for a brief moment, she thought she was in a horror movie, waiting for Dracula or Frankenstein's monster to come get her. Suddenly, she heard laughter in her head, and felt instantly comforted. Draco was sending soothing comfort through the bond, and the feel of him calmed her down. Footsteps on the stairs sounded horribly loud in the silent room, and she looked toward them. She tried to cram herself into the farthest corner from the stairs, attempting to make herself as small and unnoticeable as possible until she knew whether the person was friend or foe. The shadows were too thick to see properly, and she eyed the large, manlike shadow as it approached the cage. A face finally came into view, with smiling blue-grey eyes surrounded by black hair. The smile on the face was wide and open, and instantly Phoenix felt safe.

"Hey girl. I'm Sirius Black. I'm Draco's cousin, and I'm here to get you out. Are you ok?"

"Yeah. My face hurts a little, and I'm kinda hungry."

Your face? What happened to your face?"

"Dumbledore slapped me. I spit in his face first, though, so I guess I deserved it."

"No, girl. Dumbledore deserved to be spit on. He took you. And for hitting you, he deserves a whole lot more. Let's get you out of here and get you home." Phoenix grinned hugely at the prospect of going home, and danced from foot to foot as she waited for Sirius to open the cage. There was no lock, but Black couldn't open the latch; Dumbledore had spelled it locked. It took the man several frustrating moments to disable the locks and wards on the cage so he could free her, but he finally succeeded. He reached out his hand, and after a moment's hesitation, she took it. He led her carefully back upstairs and through the dark house to the fireplace. He tossed in the floo powder and gently pushed her in. She called out, "Malfoy Manor" and was instantly transported. Draco was waiting on the other side to catch her as she tumbled out.

“We are definitely going to have to teach you how to do that better,” he said with a smirk on his face. The humor in his eyes died as he saw the condition of her face. Her cheek was swollen and started to bruise, and the cut on her lip was crusted with dried blood. Draco’s face darkened in intense rage, and his magic started to manifest. Phoenix relished the feel of the magic for a moment, the sensations crawling over her skin as their shared magic spiraled together. Then she reached up to touch his cheek with her hand, and leaned up to softly kiss his lips. The fury died as quickly as it started, and he blushed. She smiled lovingly at him, then turned to her parents. They held out their arms, and she ran to them, hugging them fiercely to herself.

“Since it is Friday, and your therapy session is tomorrow evening, I think you should stay until Sunday evening,” Lucius intoned. “Your room is waiting. Welcome back. Narcissa will be up shortly to take care of the damage that megalomaniac caused to your face. We will see you in the morning. I love you, child.”

“I love you, too, Father.” She reached up and kissed the elder Malfoy’s cheek, then turned and kissed Narcissa’s. Draco grabbed her hand, and together they ran up the stairs to the room they now shared. Though Draco still had his own room, he slept with her, making her always feel safe and loved. The pair settled on the bed, Draco sitting behind the girl, arms wrapped around her and holding her against his chest. She leaned her head on his shoulder, sighing with contentment. All too soon, Narcissa appeared at the door with some healing potions. She also brought two small wrapped packages.

“This one,” she handed a blue vial to the girl, “will heal the split lip. This one,” a violet vial, “will heal the bruise and reduce the swelling. The packages are for the both of you. Sweet dreams.” She left after ensuring the girl had taken the potions. The kids turned around to face each other, holding the packages in their hands. They locked eyes, silver to emerald, thoughts flying.

What do you suppose they could be? the girl asked.

I don’t know. We’ll have to open them to find out.

Draco opened his first. Inside was a dragon pendant and a note from Lucius.

My Dragon,

This is a special pendant. The center contains a drop of blood from Phoenix. Wear this, as she will wear a companion piece, and you will never be separated again. No matter where you are or she is, you will always find each other. This is the best way I know to protect you both.

Much love,

Lucius.

The blonde looked at his mate, stunned for a moment. She opened her package, and inside was a butterfly pendant with a note from Lucius.

My Phoenix,

This is a special pendant. The center contains a drop of blood from Draco. Wear this, as he will wear a companion piece, and you will never be separated again. No matter where you are or he is, you will always find each other. This is the best way I know to protect you both.

Much love,

Lucius.

"Well," Draco said after a moment's pause, "at least we know that Father is predictable. Couldn't be arsed to come up with a different note for each of us. Oh, well. Let me put yours on you." The girl obediently turned around and lifted her hair. The necklace to prevent Dumbledore from removing the memory block had long since been discarded, and this was a welcome and cherished addition. She felt his fingers graze her neck as he did the clasp of the chain, and she shivered as unknown sensations trembled through her body. She caught her breath for a moment, her green eyes going cloudy with

yet-undiscovered desires. His fingers withdrew, and she dropped her hair and took a couple of deep breaths, marshalling her emotions. She turned around and smiled brilliantly at him, motioning him to turn around so she could return the favor.

Draco spun and dropped his head a little toward his chest, to allow her easier access. Her fingers stroked lightly across the nape of his neck as she fastened the chain, and he gasped at the electric shocks that coursed through him. Phoenix felt him shudder, and jerked her hands away. A brief thought that her touch repulsed him flashed through her head, but was quickly banished.

No, love. Your touch does not repulse me. I was just really surprised at how good it felt. How really, really good it felt. Really good.

Ok, Draco. I get it. It felt good.

Really good. Phoenix laughed, delighted. She laughed harder at the blush she saw creeping up the back of his neck. She feathered her fingers over his neck once more when she finished, and saw him shiver again. Oh, he's going to be so much fun...

Dumbledore couldn't wait to see his prize so he floored to Grimmauld Place early the next morning and hustled down the cellar stairs.

"Hello, my child. How are you this fine morn..." His words trickled to a stop as he spied the open cage door and no child. His face paled, then flushed brick red as uncontrolled fury rushed through him. His magic responded to the rage and crockery and windows all through the house exploded. The force of his rage resulted in a sudden "spring storm" that blew down power lines and caused several fires throughout muggle London. He seethed for several minutes, then went and summoned the rest of the members of the Order. There's a traitor in our midst. I must ferret them out. I can't have ANYONE interfere with my carefully laid plans.

As the Order members started to arrive, he watched each one carefully, examining their faces, their eyes. Looking for the flush of guilt, of betrayal. He also searched to see who wouldn't respond. Those who didn't show automatically became suspect. He rolled

through his memories, marking those who were away on “assignment” and eliminating them as suspects. Once everyone had arrived, Dumbledore chaired the meeting, rehashing what had already been discussed and seeking progress reports on the Order activities. Tea and scones were served, and everyone chatted amiably. The headmaster couldn’t discern any subterfuge amongst the attendees, so he excused himself and went back down cellar, hoping to find some clues. As he wasn’t a true wizard, he could not see or sense magical signatures. The wizards and witches were still ciphers to him, but he was getting closer to understanding and assimilating. Some of the tricks that came naturally to them eluded the old man. Sensing magical signatures was one of them, unfortunately for him. Soon, he thought. Soon I will be just like them, only insanely more powerful, and able to eradicate the human menace. Soon I will be able to free my brethren. Soon I will own the world...

Saturday dawned bright and early, and the raven-haired girl groaned as the sunlight pounded against her closed eyelids. She heard an answering groan from the boy curled against her, and cracked her emerald eyes open. She found herself looking into mercury-colored orbs, and smiled dreamily at him. His eyes darkened, and a strange look crossed his face. She frowned, worried, and reached up to touch his face. Suddenly, he leaned down and kissed her lips, sticking his tongue out to stroke her bottom lip. She gasped in shocked surprise, and his tongue gently pushed into her mouth. He stroked it along her palate briefly, before pulling back and breaking the kiss. Her face was flushed and hot; sensations, weird but good, coursed through her small frame, and she trembled. His eyes widened as his body began to respond, and he leapt out of the bed and dashed from the room. She watched him go, sadness beginning to curl through her. He DOES find me repulsive. Tears started from her eyes. Suddenly, she felt a warmth through the bond.

No, baby, he demurred, I don't find you repulsive. Quite the contrary, actually. I had an...erm...unexpected reaction to the kiss. I didn't want to frighten you.

Oh. Ooooh.

Yeah. Laughing, Phoenix slowly crawled from the bed and headed to the bathroom to shower. After making herself presentable, she went to Draco's room to wait. He was still in the shower, and she stayed out of his head, not really wanting to know what he was doing in there. A half hour later, he finally sauntered out of the bathroom, a towel wrapped around his waist. Flushing in embarrassment, Phoenix fled the room. It was Draco's turn to laugh, and he did. Dressing, he met her at the top of the stairs, and they went to breakfast. At the table, while the children loaded their plates, Lucius was reading the Daily Prophet, and snorting in disgust.

"Look at this," he said. "The Prophet has listed those who are supposedly followers of the Dark Lord. Our name is on this list, as are the names of Parkinson, Bullstrode, Zabini, Crabbe, Goyle and Nott. These are all people who have been helping and befriending you, Phoenix. This is going to greatly damage reputations. We need to find

a way to expose some of Dumbledore's lies, without putting ourselves in a compromising situation."

"Maybe we can contact some of the Order," mused Narcissa. "I can speak with Sirius and Lupin, get a feel for who in the Order seems to be questioning the old man. I know we need to avoid the Weasleys, but I think I can speak to Nymphadora, get her perspective as well."

"Actually, about the Weasleys," Draco spoke up. "We need to avoid most of them; the Weasley twins seem to be...less inclined to follow like sheep. I have already spoken to them about the attempted sexual assault by Ron, and they're livid. They've been listening in to Order meetings, and listening to their parents talk, and they seem to be of the opinion that Dumbledore is not who everyone thinks he is. They also have their suspicions about Harry Potter. I think, when you get Sirius and Remus and Nymphadora, let us know and we'll contact Fred and George Weasley. Set it up for a weekend while we're here; we can clear up a lot of misinformation."

"That's an excellent idea, son," Lucius beamed proudly at the boy. Draco's chest puffed at the praise, and he grinned at Phoenix. She rolled her eyes and smirked, shaking her head in amusement.

"We can get a better feel for the school politics and alliances as well with the Weasley twins on our side. They seem to be genuinely liked by everyone in the school, and their pranks may actually be useful." Phoenix nodded in agreement.

"We have Granger on our side," she said. "She and Nott have been working on interhouse unity. They've been meeting in the Room of Requirement, making plans. I think we could include the twins, and use them to spy on the Order for us. Granger can spy on Dumbledore; she seems to be the perfect Gryffindor, and I don't think he would suspect her of doing anything that Slytherin. Her intelligence is astonishing. She's too smart by half, and I think that would be our greatest advantage. Draco is a brilliant strategist, as well as a natural leader. He's been the impetus behind the developments in our plans. I'm very proud of him." Silver eyes glowed with warmth and happiness at the praise, and he looked at his

parents in time to see their faces shining with respect and admiration. He smiled widely, then blushed and dropped his eyes.

“Well,” Lucius suddenly barked into the silence, startling everyone, “now that we have that all worked out, I think it is time to get to your lessons. We will continue with wand lessons for a time, then I want the both of you in the library for some more Dark Arts theory and practice.”

“I believe that our lessons on comportment and breeding are finished, Phoenix,” Narcissa said, “so the rest of the afternoon before your therapy is free to do with as you will.” The kids looked at each other, anticipation in their eyes. Flying! They were going to go flying! Since the wards were strengthened, Draco found that Phoenix was a natural on a broom. They spent hours together soaring over the Quiddich pitch, indulging in aerobatics that had some of the observing house elves squealing in terror for the children’s safety.

After breakfast, the kids followed Lucius to the dungeons, where they began practicing more intricate wand spells. They had no worry about the Ministry punishing them for the use of underage magic; the house was protected by spells preventing any magic performed in the house being registered. Lucius had begun integrating darker spells into the training, knowing that the curses and dark magic would be necessary when the time for battle arrived. Draco and Phoenix advanced at a startling rate, their ability to use their magic at a third year level.

“I think, starting next weekend, we will begin training you two on the use of wandless magic. It is one of the most difficult disciplines to accomplish, and a very rare few witches and wizards are able to perform it. Most who can do wandless magic can only do small, simple spells. It takes a great deal of power and concentration to accomplish, and can be very draining. I believe the both of you are powerful enough to accomplish this. It may take many years to perfect the ability, so be prepared to be disappointed at first.” The kids nodded, then followed Lucius back to the library, where they took lessons on the Dark Arts. After their lessons, they fled outside into the warm sunshine, flying and looping over the Quiddich pitch. Phoenix had let her hair down, and it flew behind her in a ebony curtain as she soared and dipped in the air. Draco paused in his flying, hovering,



just watching the beauty as she enjoyed her freedom in the air. Her face was lit with a beatific smile, and her emerald eyes glowed with happiness. Draco felt his heart squeeze as he watched his raven-haired goddess, his body flushing hotly at the view. Embarrassed at the way his body was reacting, he quickly descended and put the broom away. The girl saw this and followed him, worried.

“Are you ok? You look funny.” Draco nodded, not trusting himself to speak. She reached out and touched his flushed cheek, then ran her hand to his forehead, checking for warmth. He grabbed her hand and gripped it tightly, pulling it gently from his face. His silver eyes met hers, and she sucked in a breath at the swirling emotion in their mercury depths. He tried to smile, but it came out as more of a pained grimace, and she frowned.

“Are you hurt?”

“No,” he finally managed to squeak. “I’m ok. Just a little...erm...tired.” She smiled at him, and his heart went into overtime. Unable to resist any longer, he leaned forward and gently placed his lips on hers, stroking her lower lip with the tip of his tongue. She opened her mouth and his tongue slid between her parted lips, dancing with her tongue and exploring her mouth. She sighed shakily and bunched her hands into his robes, clinging onto him. His arms slowly snaked around her, pulling her closer to him, and he felt her tremble. She tastes of sunshine and summer, he thought distractedly. He slowly pulled back, panting a little. He looked into her flushed face, and she smiled tremulously, suddenly shy. She leaned her forehead against his shoulder, still trembling, and he stroked his hand through her raven locks. They stood locked in the embrace for a short time, enjoying the feel the other in their arms, when the pop of a house elf startled them badly. They jumped apart almost guiltily as the elf informed them of lunch. They looked at each other again, both red faced, then slowly walked back to the Manor. Phoenix, not wanting to be out of contact with Draco, reached out and grabbed his hand, their fingers entwining. He glanced over at her and smiled, happy that she wasn’t mad at him.

The rest of the day passed in a blur, and the kids didn’t separate from each other at all. When it was time for therapy, everyone met in the

lounge, prepared for another healing circle. Healer Redwing had some news, however.

"You will no longer need to go through therapy, Phoenix. My magic tells me that, while you may still have the occasional nightmare, you are, for all intents and purposes, healed. There is nothing more I can do. I am very proud of the progress you have made. The love and spirit I see glowing from your eyes tells me that you will be much stronger now. Go in peace, little Wo-yi." He smiled at them and left. Lucius turned to her, pride shining in his eyes.

"I can feel like part of the family now," she said. "I don't feel like a freak anymore. I'm not afraid of being touched anymore. I feel...freer than I've ever felt before. Thank you for helping me, Father. Thank you for loving me, Mother. Thank you, Dragon, for saving my life."

The return to school was uneventful, save for the Weasley twins. They had spelled their brother's hair green and silver, with writhing snakes like a medusa. Phoenix laughed until she cried, and she and Draco invited Fred and George into the Slytherin common room for a pow-wow. Hermione was also asked to join the meeting.

"We want to include you in the plans to take down Dumbledore," Draco began. "We think you would be instrumental in that end. We need you to spy on the Order, and ferret out any information you can on the headmaster's plans from your parents. We also need you to keep planning your pranks. Don't commit any for now; we may need them later for diversions should we need to sneak into Dumbledore's office, or gain access to the Grimmauld place. We just want you to be on your toes." The twins grinned maniacally and nodded, excitement glowing in their twinkling blue eyes. Phoenix turned to Hermione.

"Granger, we need you to be our spy on Dumbledore. We need you to act the perfect Gryffindor, going along with his plans whenever possible. Any information you think we need, for our protection or to further our plans in his downfall, please let us know. If there are any more of your dorm mates or any other house members that you think would work well as spies, please have them meet with us. We can make arrangements to meet individually in the library, to chat and scope them out." Draco's eyes lit up as he remembered something.

"Weasleys, I need a prank as payback to Dumbledore for the grievous sin of touching what doesn't belong to him. He dared to take Phoenix from me, and he hit her. I need him to know that she is protected, and that he crossed a line. Let me know when you come up with something." Fred's eyes whirled with ideas, and his brother grinned, knowing that something was being plotted at that very moment.

"We'll get back to you," Fred said, promise in his voice. Draco grinned, knowing it would be something fan-damn-tastic. Draco adjourned the meeting. He went to Nott to speak to him privately.

"Theo, I need you to gather together all of the people from the other houses. We need to set up a meeting in the Room of Requirement. I have a proposal that I need to talk over with Phoenix, but I think is needed at this juncture. When you set it up, let me know." Theo nodded and left to talk to the other houses.

"Phoenix, I need to speak to you privately." The emerald-eyed girl nodded, and they adjourned to the bedroom they shared. "I wanted to talk to you about training the...club, for lack of a better term...in defensive magic. I think we could build an effective army against Dumbledore if we train the others in some of the wand skills and Dark Arts skills that Father is teaching us. We know a fight is coming, and we all need to be prepared for it. If we start now, when the time comes we will be more than ready for it."

"Draco, I think it's a brilliant idea. I'd like Father to come in and oversee some of the training. I know that Severus also has skills that Father does not, and I think he'd be a great teacher as well. Especially if we can get training in defensive potions and special poisons. We need to be trained in things that our classes will never cover; practical applications and uses. We are going to be going to war, and everyone needs to be prepared for it." She stepped up to the blonde, sliding her arms around his waist and hugging him tightly. He squeezed her back, leaning his cheek on the top of her head and inhaling the fragrance of her ebony curls. He let out a moaning sigh, and she giggled as the sound rumbling through his chest tickled her ear. He stroked his fingers along her back, causing shivers to course

through her. He stopped his movements for a moment, but when she snuggled deeper into his arms, he continued stroking her back. They stood like that for several moments, enjoying each other, when there was a quiet tap on the door. Sighing quietly, Draco let go of the girl and answered the door.

“Yes, Theo, how may I help you?” The blonde fought to keep the impatience out of his voice.

“I’ve met with the chief organizers from the other houses, and they’ve assured me that everyone will meet in the R of R after dinner on Wednesday. We’ll be able to go over strategies then.”

“Excellent, Theo. There are a few announcements we need to make at the meeting. Things are going to accelerate from this point.” Theo grinned and left to speak with Hermione. Draco turned back to the girl, who had by this time moved to the bottom bunk and stretched out. She stared at the bottom of the top bunk, hands behind her head, a thoughtful look on her face. He sauntered over to her and sat on the edge of the bed next to her.

“What are you thinking?” he asked curiously. She glanced over at him, her green eyes shuttered.

“I’m wondering how dangerous all of this is going to be. I don’t want to see any students hurt, but I know that training them for battle is a necessity. Dumbledore’s agenda isn’t leaving us any wiggle room. I’m scared that things will happen before we’re really ready to deal with them. You and I are magically strong, but still so very untried and untrained. I just don’t want to face any of this before we’re ready. Really ready. I know many of the students here are gifted, but they are also very under trained. I hope we have time.”

“I understand how you feel,” he responded. “I’m also very leery about using the students for battle. I know we have at least five years to train. We can keep spies in the enemy camps and keep up with Dumbledore’s movements. As long as he doesn’t make any overt gestures or attempts on you, we should have enough time to prepare. I don’t believe he’ll do anything really drastic until he resurrects Harry Potter. So we have time.” She smiled at him, relaxing. She couldn’t

fault his logic, and hearing it out loud helped to put her mind at ease. She reached up to him, pulling him down on the bed beside her, cuddling into him. He wrapped himself around her, seeking to offer the comfort she needed. They lay like that for a while, Draco gently kissing her face. She smiled up at him, and met his lips with her own. Her lips opened, and she stroked his bottom lip with her tongue. He opened his mouth, inviting her to taste and she accepted. They shared kisses for a while, until there was a tap on the door. Sighing in frustration, Draco rose from the bed and answered the door. George and Fred were standing there.

“How did you guys get in here?”

“One of the first years let us in. We told them we were working on a project for you. We have a prank for Dumbledore, if you’re interested.” Eyebrows wagged comically, making Draco laugh and release his tension. He bade them enter the room, and they glanced at the girl on the bed, seeing her flushed face.

“I hope we weren’t interrupting anything,” George leered at the blonde. Draco smacked the twin on the arm, laughing.

“What’s this prank?” The twins pulled up chairs by the bedside, and the two younger kids listened as the redheads laid out the plans for the plotted revenge. Draco smirked evilly as he listened, and Phoenix’s clear, bell-like laughter rung through the room. He won’t know what hit him, but he’ll know WHY, Draco thought evilly.

Breakfast in the Great Hall on Monday was memorable. The students had all filed in, and the teachers were all at the head table. Dumbledore, as usual, was in the center, looking over his “kingdom” with arrogance. Draco and Phoenix saw the expression on his face, and grinned at each other, knowing what was coming. It didn’t take long for the prank to manifest. Dumbledore had taken a few bites of his breakfast, when suddenly, his hair and beard turned a shocking shade of neon pink. Above his head, glowing letters suddenly appeared, spelling out a message for all to see. I am a kidnapper and pedophile, it said in bright white letters. Everyone could see the color change and letters, and everyone in the hall knew that the prank spell was a truth-telling spell. Whatever the past evil deeds, the spell would

publish for the world to see. Fred and George had modified it so that it would change the hair color as well, to make a bolder statement. The color of his hair and beard would instantly attract attention to him, and the message that floated above his head would be read.

Conversation ceased in the Great Hall for many long moments, as everyone stared in shock at their venerable old headmaster, before a loud snort from Snape broke the silence. Whispers, then loud conversations began to fill the silence, and the headmaster looked on in confusion as everyone stared and pointed at him. The teachers began whispering about him, and he overheard random words. Flushing in embarrassment at the attention, and not really sure why everyone was staring and talking about him, he fled the Great Hall, making it to his office moments later, where he hid for the rest of the day.

---

---

Wo-yi- Phoenix

After the prank on Dumbledore, the man was rarely seen. News of the revelations from the truth spell had somehow been released, and the Wizarding world was treated to the exalted name of Albus Dumbledore being raked over the coals. Whenever he showed his face, which became more and more rare, people pointed and yelled nasty things at him. His fury built from this humiliation, but he knew he could do nothing in his present incarnation. He knew he had to wait for the girl to reach her potential power limit before he could do anything to affect a change in the world. So he seethed. And sulked. And pouted.

Phoenix and Draco continued to get smarter and better in school. With the weekend studies done with Lucius, the children were far surpassing even the most powerful witches and wizards. They were becoming a true force to be reckoned with, and were training a valuable and strong army. Hermione and Theo provided much needed influence and support, and with them as the figureheads of the organization, it grew by leaps and bounds. They had to expand their training into several days, as more and more students and even teachers wanted to become part of the resistance. Phoenix was finally able to clue everyone in on the whole Harry Potter legend, and what the true purpose of Albus Dumbledore was. The teachers understood all about the Djinn, and what they were capable of, and what they could be capable of when they became more human. They took the time to educate the students of Hogwarts, to prepare them for the battle to come.

Lucius and Narcissa were able to contact select Order members, who proceeded to tell them that Dumbledore wasn't part of the Order anymore. It seemed that, after the newspaper stories, the Order took it upon themselves to kick the old man out of his seat as head of the organization. Shacklebolt was now the leader, and he had started investigating the "muggle killings" that had occurred. He was stunned to find out that the crimes were perpetrated, not by Death Eaters allied with Voldemort, but by his own Order members. Well, not all of them, anyway. So Shacklebolt was one of the people meeting with the Malfoys. At this meeting were also Lupin, Black, Tonks, both Weasleys, McGonagall, Snape, and Fletcher. The rest couldn't be trusted. Fred and George Weasley were included, as well as Phoenix

and Draco. Phoenix had a story to tell, and needed to be there to tell it.

“Before we all talk about what’s going on in the Wizarding world right now, I need to clarify some false information that you’ve been fed over the years. First of all, I am Harry Potter.” Shocked gasps filled the room, and more than a few outcries were heard. She held her hand up for silence. “I am Harry Potter. That is what my birth certificate says. My parents had an amusing sense of humor—well at least they thought so—and named me such. My parents didn’t die, nor were they murdered by a man called Voldemort. My father is a daemon, and my mother a Fury. They were taken back to their realms because they created me, and I wasn’t supposed to be. The Dursleys were no relation of mine; I was sent to that pedophile so that he could indoctrinate me as a submissive, cowed individual, so that Dumbledore could bond with me when I reached the appropriate age. This way, he could take my power. He’s a Djinn, and leader of a faction trying to become more human so that they can take over the world. They want to eradicate the human race, and will start with the Wizarding world. Dumbledore paid pigman to molest and rape me from the age of three. The Malfoys saved my life, and are my parents now. There is no Lord Voldemort. He does not exist. The scar that used to be on my forehead was caused when I got hit in the head with one of my cousin’s toys. It got severely infected and, after treatment by my aunt, turned into that funny lightning bolt shape. You’ve all been following a lie. As Shacklebolt has found, all of the “Death Eater” attacks were perpetrated by people in your own organization. I need you all on the outside to spy and watch. You need to protect my family. He will try to hurt me through them. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, I need to talk to you after this meeting, please.” With that, the girl left, Draco on her heels. As soon as she left the unnaturally silent room, shouting and loud conversation broke out.

“They’re going to be in there for days, arguing all of this,” Draco said with a smirk. He grabbed her hand, and they walked up to their room, where they spent the rest of the night laughing and playing games. Being kids.

Molly and Arthur Weasley were shown up to Phoenix’s room where they held their meeting.



"Mrs. Weasley, you need to have a talk with your son Ronald. He's been...difficult this year, and I believe he's become quite the willing pawn of Dumbledore. Near the beginning of the year, he attempted to assault me," Molly gasped in horror, "and he also port keyed me to the basement of Grimmauld place, where I was stuck in the werewolf's cage. I don't know if Dumbledore has some kind of mind control spell on him, or some kind of amulet controlling his actions. You need to fix it. If he continues to get in my way, I will not be responsible for what may happen to him."

"Of course, dear. I will see what I can do." The Weasleys left, leaving the kids to get ready for bed.

"Well, Phoenix, this year is almost over. We get to go home for the summer."

"Since the Dursleys are dead, where am I to go? I have no home." This was said with wistful sadness.

"Nonsense. You live here. This is your home."

"It's nice that your family allows me to stay here for holidays and on weekends, but I can't stay here all the time. I'm not their child. I don't belong here." Draco walked up to the girl and wrapped his arms around her.

"You are family. You are to be my mate; we are blood bonded, and as far as wizarding law is concerned, that makes you family." The girl smiled sadly.

"The bond can be broken..."

"No, it can't. It's a blood bond, which means that you and I share blood. You are family, and I don't want to hear any more."

"You don't know how happy I am to know that I have somewhere I belong. That someone loves me. And wants me. I love you, Dragon."

"I love you, too, my Phoenix. Now, lets get to bed. I'm beat."

The last days of the school year were spent preparing and making plans. The kids knew that nothing could happen for a while, as Dumbledore had disappeared, most likely licking his psychic wounds. With the manipulative bastard out of the picture for the time being, Professor McGonagall became Headmistress, with Snape as Assistant Headmaster. Since both were solidly on Phoenix's side, she felt protected and safe in the school for the first time. Her Slytherins were always guarding her, and Weasley seemed to back off. She would catch him looking at her thoughtfully, without the malice or rage in his eyes. Just before the final Leaving Feast, the redhead approached the girl, and she tensed. Draco was on the other side of the hall, talking to some of the army, and didn't see his approach.

Draco?

Yes, love.

Weasley's coming. I need you here.

On my way.

By the time Weasley had made his way to the girl, Draco was standing behind her, hands on her waist, offering comfort and protection.

"Miss Evans. My mother found the amulet that was used to control me. It was attached to the small of my back. I had just assumed it was a birthmark, and mum never needed to inspect me before. I wish to apologize for everything. I didn't know that I was being manipulated, and I'm sorry."

"Thank you. And please, call me Phoenix." Ron nodded.

"I would like to join your cause. I want to help put that old man out of everyone's misery." Phoenix considered the offer very carefully.

What do you think, Dragon?

I don't know. Can we really trust him?

No, I don't think we can. We can use him, but I don't think he should be included into the inner circle. I still get an...off feeling about him. Something not quite right.

I agree. He feels...shielded somehow. Like he's unaware of some small aspect of his mind. We'll have to ask Sev or my father about that.

Yes, let's explore that over vacation.

Looking at Ron, Phoenix made a decision.

"Thank you, Ron. We would appreciate the help. I am in contact with your twin brothers, and I will let them know of your allegiance. Should I need anything, I will let you know." Ron bowed, startling the girl, then walked away.

"That was weird," she muttered. Draco laughed.

"No, actually, that was completely appropriate. It's a pureblood custom to bow like that at the conclusion of a meeting."

"Ah." Professor McGonagall stood up at the dais, tapping on it to gain everyone's attention.

"It is time to start the Leaving Feast. Everyone, take your seats." Because of the training and intermingling of everyone, the House tables no longer existed. Hufflepuffs sat with Ravenclaws who sat with Gryffindors who sat with Slytherins. For the first time in Hogwarts history, there was no house rivalry. Every house was communicating and getting along with every other house. No child felt left out, or bullied, or picked on, or excluded. It was truly a great achievement, and it was due to the union of two children.

The food was excellent, as usual, and the noise level in the Great Hall was louder than it had ever been. No one was afraid of someone else overhearing. They all shared one common goal: the fight against Dumbledore.

The train ride from Hogsmeade station was uneventful. Almost boring. It wasn't until the train had reached King's Cross that things became interesting. Looking out the window, Phoenix and Draco saw their parents waiting, smiles wreathing their faces. Other families, waiting for their children, looked at the Malfoys with surprise; they had never seen this pureblood family express anything other than cold disdain. To see the smiles of joy on their faces, people started to rethink their opinions on the pureblood family. That show of emotion went a long way to healing the breach between the Malfoys and the rest of the Wizarding world. The train stopped, and the students struggled to get their luggage off of the train, excitement in the air. When Phoenix and Draco disembarked, they dropped their trunks and pelted toward their parents, almost leaping into their arms in happiness. Both children were squeezed very tightly and the whole platform felt and saw the love of the family. More hearts thawed toward the Malfoys, and children from the other families walked up to the group, chatting with the blonde and brunette, and being introduced to the parents. The atmosphere around the family group was relaxed and carefree, and everyone who approached felt welcomed. The kids made plans to visit with their 'army' during the summer, and Lucius started making plans for enlarging his training rooms, a grin on his face. My Draco and Phoenix. I'm so very proud of them.

They walked through the barrier back to the muggle world, dragging the trunks to the limo waiting at the curb. As they passed a couple, suddenly a voice cried out.

"There she is! There's our daughter!" Everyone turned toward the voice, including the Malfoys. Phoenix's eyes widened as the couple strode determinedly toward her. Not again, she thought. The man was tall, reed-thin, with a scar running from the corner of his left eye to the corner of his mouth, giving him a deadly appearance. His hair was auburn, and his clothes screamed money. The woman walking next to him was shorter than him by about a foot. She had short, spiky black hair, and was plump. Her face was birdlike, with a short, beaky nose and very thin lips. Her eyes were almost black, and the look on her face was anything but friendly. They reached the Malfoys, and tried to grab the girl. Draco stood in front of her, and his magic started to flare. The strange couple stared at the blonde, feeling the spike in power, but unafraid.

“That old man told us that this was our long-lost daughter. We’re here to claim her. We have paperwork that says we can have her. Now.” The auras emanating from the couple were pitch black. They exuded such a feeling of loathsome evil that everyone who stood near could feel their skin crawl with revulsion. Suddenly, the Malfoys were surrounded by several families, barricading them from the strange couple. The pair took a step back; the old man never said anything about having to face this many people to get the girl. He said it would be relatively easy to overpower the parents and grab the girl.

Lucius Malfoy smirked widely as the families of the children supporting his children formed a protective barrier. He looked around at the families, and swelled with pride. The Malfoy name has just gone up in esteem. We have staunch supporters here. We are no longer outcasts in our own society. The strange couple attempted to move closer, to try to touch or grab the girl, and wands were suddenly in their faces. Eyes impossibly wide, the couple turned and walked away.

“Fuck this,” the man was heard to snarl. “No amount of money in the world is worth this kind of trouble.” Phoenix let out the breath she was holding and grinned hugely at the surrounding families.

“Thank you all for protecting us.” Turning to the kids, she nodded. “We’ll owl over the summer to let you know what the training schedule will be. Father has a great deal of knowledge that he’ll be willing to share to help us fight Dumbledore when the time is right. See you soon.” The Malfoy family turned as a unit and walked to the limo, getting in and settling as the car pulled away from the curb. Phoenix snuggled next to Draco, her thoughts on the future, on the fight ahead, and on her family.

---

---

A/N: This is where I'll end this story. I'll start posting the sequel, titled Nope; Still Not Me shortly. It will start at fifth year, with the return of "Harry Potter" and the intrigue surrounding the doppelganger. Thank

you for sticking with this for so long. I know it got a little tiring in some places but hopefully the second 'book' will be more interesting.